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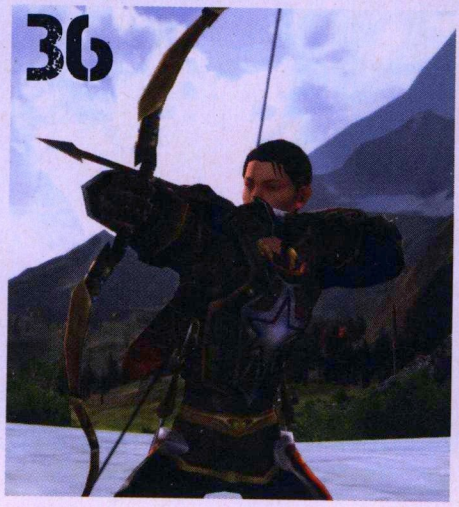

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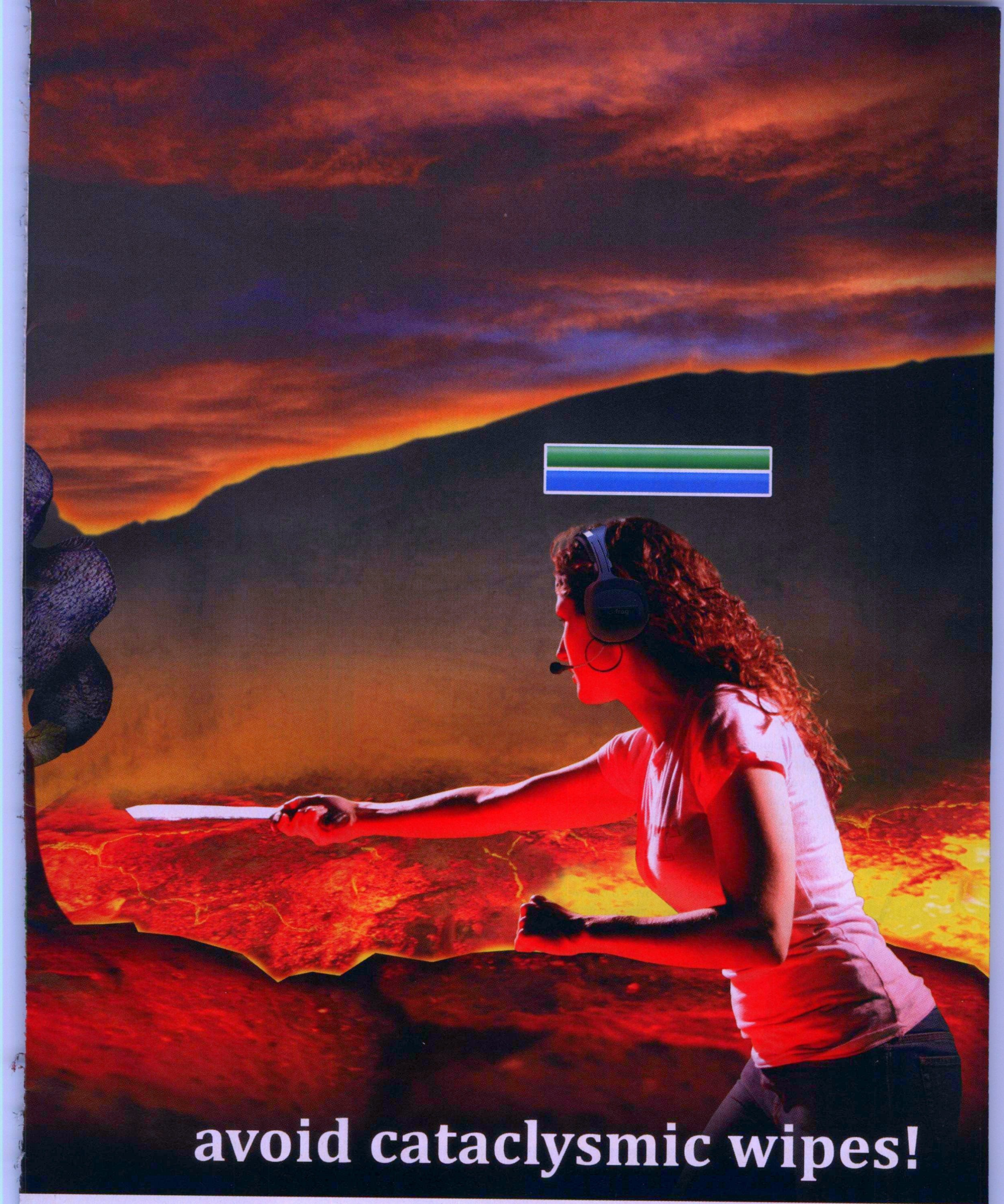

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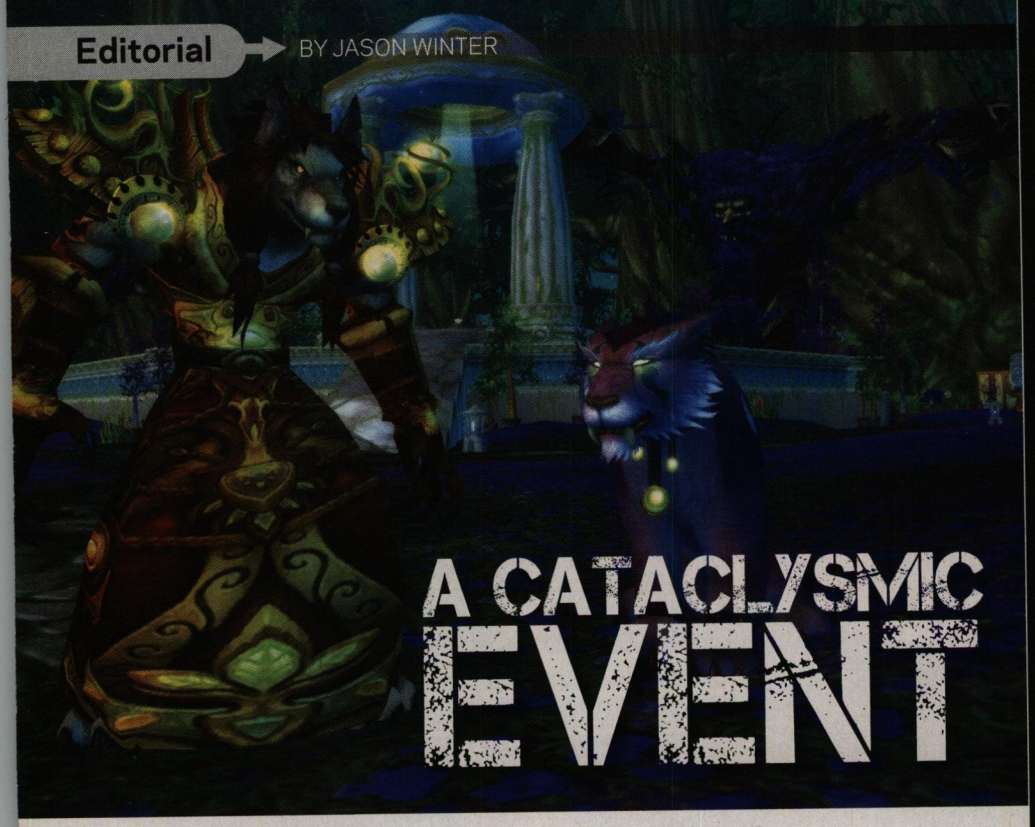

A CATACLYSMIC EVENT

What's the best thing about *Cataclysm* coming out? I mean besides the goblins and the worgens, and the new class/race combinations (like the lovely blood elf warrior on our cover), and the new Barrens, and the new zones, and leveling to 85… no, the best thing about *Cataclysm* coming out is that I no longer have to come up with witty headlines and subheads utilizing the word "cataclysm." As you can tell by the drab headline of this column, I'm pretty much out of ideas. Hey, we'll all have our reasons for liking the expansion, and that's mine.

(Once I took a picture of an SUV that was on fire in my office's parking lot and posted it on my blog with the title, "Burning Escalade." Clever, huh? And it wasn't even an Escalade!)

But yeah, once you actually play *Cataclysm* (which you might be doing now, depending on when you bought this magazine… well, you're not doing it *right now*, you're reading a magazine… oh, you know what I mean), prepare to be blown away and have your free time sucked from you like that giant vacuum cleaner sucked up all the air of Druidia in *Spaceballs*. Insert "suck to blow" joke here.

If you can find time to drag yourself away from taking down Deathwing, don't forget to vote for your favorite games in the 2010 Massive Online Gamer Reader's Choice Awards! You can take a look at the entries on pages 8-9 or just head right over to our web site, www.massiveonlinegamer.com to cast your vote today. Tell all your friends to vote – ballot-box stuffing is allowed and encouraged.

'Til next time, may the Schwartz be with you.

Jason Winter
Associate Editor

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BY JASON WINTER

MOG NEWS

WE QUEST TO BRING YOU THE COOL, THE RAD, AND THE FUGLY FROM THE WORLD OF MMOS!

COOL: WORLD OF DARKNESS MMO

After Dungeons & Dragons, the most popular offline RPG is probably White Wolf's adult-themed, vampire/werewolf/mage-populated *World of Darkness*. When CCP Games, makers of *Eve Online*, acquired White Wolf in 2006, it seemed only a matter of time before the *WoD* was adapted to MMO form. The official announcement came in September and, like the RPG world it's based upon, don't expect the entire game to be all about bloodsucking and throat-slashing. Developers promise that the game will heavily feature "player politics and social interaction," with a moody, melodramatic backdrop. Fine, just so long as I don't have to roleplay my centuries-aged angst…

RAD: 3-D ZOMBIE MMO DEAD FRONTIER

If vampires aren't your cup o' undead, how about zombies? Creaky Corpse Ltd:'s *Dead Frontier* (www.deadfrontier.com) pits intrepid zombie hunters against hordes of shambling corpses in an overhead view, browser-based MMO/shooter hybrid. Of course, the only thing better than blasting zombies is blasting zombies in 3-D, and *Dead Frontier* now offers 3-D capabilities, to make it even easier to see every piece of decaying flesh on your zombie foes before you riddle them with automatic weapons fire or shotgun shells. No, we're not having nightmares – yet.

FUGLY: GAMING STUDIOS SHUT DOWN

Last issue, we reported on some of the financial issues *All Points Bulletin*'s development studio, Realtime Worlds, was going through. Those "issues" were apparently too much to rebound from, as the game took a critical head shot on Sept. 15, shutting down its servers with just a day's notice to fans.

Meanwhile, Austin-based Electric Bat Interactive, makers of the *Weblings* and *WebLords* online games, was also shuttered in early October. The concept behind *WebLords* was that players could raise armies and fight over control of any site on the Internet, but profitability was slow to emerge and the company's controlling interests – which included the owner of the NBA's Memphis Grizzlies – pulled the plug.

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BY DOUG KALE AND JASON WINTER

BECKETT MASSIVE ONLINE GAMER 2010 READERS CHOICE AWARDS

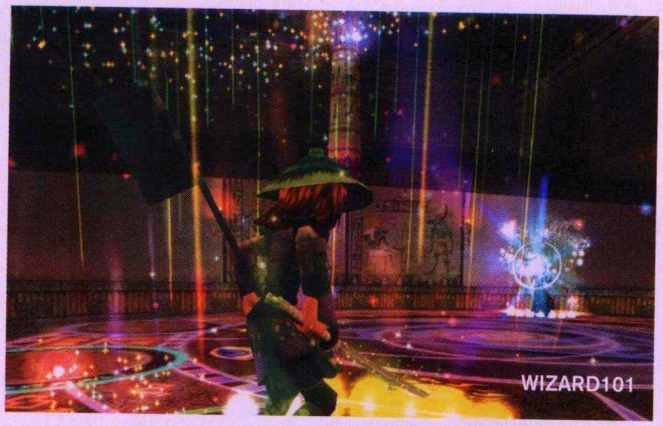
Another year has come and gone, and with it, a slew of great games, great times, and great stories. No, we don't want to hear about that time you wiped your raid by charging, Leeroy Jenkins-style, into the boss room and aggroed everything – but we do want to hear what games you think stood out as the best in online gaming for 2010. You can cast your vote online at www.massiveonlinegamer.com by December 15. We'll compile the results and print them in the next issue. Here are the contenders:

RUNES OF MAGIC

FINAL FANTASY XIV

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

FALLEN EARTH



1. Best MMO of 2010
Dungeons & Dragons Online (Turbine)
Eve Online (CCP)
EverQuest II (SOE)
Final Fantasy XIV (Square Enix)
Runes of Magic (Frogster)
Star Trek Online (Cryptic)
The Lord of the Rings Online (Turbine)
Wizard101 (KingsIsle)
World of Warcraft (Blizzard)
Other

2. Best New MMO of 2010
Allods Online (Gala)
Final Fantasy XIV (Square Enix)
Global Agenda (Hi-Rez)
LEGO Universe (LEGO Group)
Star Trek Online (Cryptic)
Other

3. Best Fantasy MMO of 2010
Aion (NCSoft)
Dungeons & Dragons Online (Turbine)
EverQuest II (SOE)
Lord of the Rings Online (Turbine)
Runes of Magic (Frogster)
World of Warcraft (Blizzard)
Other

4. Best Non-Fantasy MMO of 2010
Champions Online (Cryptic)
City of Heroes/Villains (Cryptic)
Eve Online (CCP)
Fallen Earth (Fallen Earth)
Star Trek Online (Cryptic)
Star Wars Galaxies (SOE)
Other

5. Best Kid-Friendly/All-Ages MMO of 2010
Free Realms (SOE)
LEGO Universe (LEGO Group)
Pirates of the Caribbean Online (Disney)
Pixie Hollow (Disney)
Wizard101 (KingsIsle)
World of Cars Online (Disney)
Other

6. Best Free-to-Play MMO of 2010
Atlantica Online (nDoors)
Dungeons & Dragons Online (Turbine)
EverQuest II [Extended] (SOE)
Runes of Magic (Frogster)
The Lord of the Rings Online (Turbine)
Wizard101 (KingsIsle)
WonderKing (nDoors)
Other

7. Best Online Console Game of 2010
Battlefield: Bad Company 2 (Electronic Arts)
Call of Duty: Black Ops (Activision)
Civilization V (2K Games)
Halo: Reach (Microsoft)
Medal of Honor (Electronic Arts)
StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty (Blizzard)
Other

8. Most-Anticipated MMO
DC Universe Online (SOE)
Guild Wars 2 (NCSoft)
Rift: Planes of Telara (Trion Worlds)
Star Wars: The Old Republic (LucasArts)
Tera: The Exiled Realm of Arborea (En Masse/Frogster)
The Secret World (Funcom)
World of Darkness (CCP)
Other

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Class Upheaval

When the *Cataclysm* hits *World of Warcraft* on Dec. 7, it's not just Azeroth that will be shattered – your perceptions of your favorite class will also be turned upside down. All 10 classes will get new abilities and revamped talent trees, and most will receive subtle – and not-so-subtle – adjustments to their other skills and capabilities. We've compiled the latest info (as of press time) on the following pages and advise you to pay close attention to what our class specialists have to say. Coping with, learning from, and figuring how to best exploit these changes might be the only way for you to survive the impending catastrophe…

Blood Elf Warrior

Death Knight

Cataclysm offers death knights a slew of changes to class talents and abilities. As with anything pre-release, take all of this with a grain of salt, as it were. Nothing is set in stone and if Blizzard decides to flake, all or none of this could be changed.

NEW RACES

Goblin, Worgen

NEW DEATH KNIGHT ABILITIES

Outbreak: Outbreak infects the target with both Frost Fever and Blood Plague at no rune cost. This ability allows the Death Knight to apply diseases quickly when he's switching targets or when his diseases have been dispelled.

Necrotic Strike: Necrotic Strike is a new attack that deals weapon damage and applies a debuff that absorbs an amount of healing based on the damage done. The burst is smaller, but a larger overall amount of healing would be required to bring the target back to full health.

Dark Simulacrum: The Death Knight strikes a target, applying a debuff that allows the him to copy the opponent's next spell and unleash it. Unlike Spell Reflection, Dark Simulacrum does not cancel the incoming spell. In general, if you can't reflect it, you won't be able to copy it either.

RUNE SYSTEM CHANGES

The Rune System changes are meant to help death knights feel less constrained. It will change how runes regenerate, from filling simultaneously to filling sequentially. For example, if you use two Blood runes, then the first rune will fill up before the second one starts to fill up. Essentially, you have three sets of runes filling every 10 seconds instead of six individual runes filling every 10 seconds. (Haste will cause runes to fill faster.)

TALENT TREES

Blood is being converted into a dedicated tanking tree. In addition to damage reduction and healing absorption (when you heal yourself, you'll receive an additional effect that absorbs incoming damage), the new Vengeance mechanic is designed to ensure that tank damage output (and threat) doesn't fall behind as damage-dealing classes improve their gear.

All tanking specs will have Vengeance as their second talent tree passive bonus. Whenever a tank gets hit, Vengeance will grant a stacking Attack Power buff equal to 5% of the damage done, up to a maximum of 10% of the character's unbuffed health. For boss encounters, it's expected that tanks will always have an Attack Power bonus equal to 10% of their health. The 5% and 10% bonuses assume 51 talent points have been put into the Blood tree; these values will be smaller at lower levels.

You only get the Vengeance bonus if you have spent the most talent points in the Blood tree, so you won't see Frost or Unholy specs running around with it. Vengeance will let Blizzard continue to design tank gear more or less the way they do today; there will be some damage-dealing stats, but the focus is longevity.

Unholy has always had a strong niche with diseases, magic, and command over pets and will stay that way. With the Disease Damage passive bonus, Unholy specs will be able to get more out of their diseases, which are integral to the tree's play style.

Frost is now dual-wield tree with Frost magic damage and decent crowd control. The Runic Power Generation passive will function as the name implies, and the new rune system will make generating Runic Power more appealing.

BY ERIC PETERSON

Druid

Druids return to *Cataclysm* with much of their core functionality intact, though the new talent tree changes mean that classes (and druids in particular) will no longer by able to "hybridize" between trees, meaning that popular builds like Feral/Resto or Balance/Resto will no longer exist to the same degree. Druids will be required to commit to and specialize in one of three trees, each filling a very different role.

Additionally, Balance druids have a new mechanic; they must balance Solar and Lunar energy. Solar energy is gained by nature spells, like Wrath and Hurricane, while Lunar energy is built by casting arcane spells, like Moonfire or Starfire. Once you build enough energy, you enter an "Eclipse" state, increasing your damage significantly.

While the shapeshifting forms themselves are remaining the same, cat and bear forms will both be gained within the first 12 levels of a player's career, allowing them to experience the shapeshifting aspect of the class much earlier.

NEW RACES

Troll, Worgen

NEW DRUID SPELLS

Thrash: An area-of-effect attack for bear druids that causes bleed damage to all targets within range.

Stampeding Roar: A temporary speed boost for all allies. Usable in either cat or bear form.

Wild Mushroom: Grows a magical mushroom that becomes invisible after four seconds. Enemies who cross the mushroom will detonate it. Druids can also detonate it ahead of time.

TALENT TREES

With the balance tree, you can take on the form of a powerful Moonkin, balancing the power of Arcane and Nature magic to destroy enemies at a distance. This tree makes heavy use of the Eclipse mechanic, focusing on either Lunar or Solar energy to destroy enemies from a distance. Players also have access to the Starsurge spell, a powerful nuke which functions as both a Lunar and a Solar spell.

Mastery (Total Eclipse): Increases the bonus damage from Eclipse by 12%. Each point of mastery increases the bonus by an additional 1.5%.

Feral druids take on the form of a great cat to deal damage with bleeds and bites or a mighty bear to absorb damage and protect allies. Like the rest of the tanking classes, bear druids benefit from a Vengeance mechanic that grants them additional attack power based on the damage they take. Cat druids are being buffed to be more competitive with rogues, meaning their damage will be normalized and they'll be given greater utility.

Mastery (Savage Defender): Increases the damage absorbed by your Savage Defense ability by 32%. Each point of Mastery increases the absorb by an additional 4%

Mastery (Razor Claws): Increases the damage done by your bleed abilities by 25.04%. Each point of mastery increases bleed damage by an additional 3.1%

Restoration druids use heal-over-time Nature spells to keep allies alive, taking on the form of a tree when the need is most urgent. The Restoration druid continues to focus on heal-over-time spells, though Tree of Life is now a powerful cooldown ability, similar to Metamorphosis.

Mastery (Symbiosis): Increases the potency of your healing spells by 10% on targets already afflicted by one of your heal-over-time spells. Each point of mastery increases heal potency by an additional 1.25%.

RAID ROLE

Druids will fill the same roles in *Cataclysm*, though Restoration druids will lose a certain amount of raid healing in exchange for stronger tank healing. Ultimately, they'll be able to function well in either role.

Hunter

Hunters received a significant change to their previous mechanics, while it's not game-breaking (or the ever-feared "nerf"), it will take a while to adjust to the changes. The two big changes to hunters are the removal of ammo, and the replacing of mana with focus. All hunters will appreciate the fact they no longer have to purchase ammo; at one time or another, we've all run into the dreaded out-of-ammo message, and, as Murphy's Law dictates, at the worst possible time.

The change to focus is going to take some getting used to, and shot rotations will have to be adjusted accordingly. Some shots, such as Aimed Shot, drain nearly half the focus bar, while others, such as Steady Shot, are used to generate focus. Now, the focus (so to speak) has shifted to maintaining a steady, and high, DPS output, as opposed to unloading with everything you have and hoping the target is dead before you're out of mana.

NEW RACES

Goblin, Human, Undead, Worgen

NEW HUNTER ABILITIES

Cobra Shot: Deals Nature damage in addition to weapon damage.

Aspect of the Fox: Enable the hunter to fire Steady Shot and Cobra Shot while moving.

Camouflage: Places the hunter and pet in stealth for one minute. Breaks upon damage done or received. While stealthed, the hunter is still able to lay traps.

TALENT TREES

With the change to talent trees, some skills will only be available to that tree, Aimed Shot, for instance, is now a skill only available to Marksmanship hunters. Overall, the trees have been "streamlined" combining some talents together, moving a skill out of the tree and making it a "core skill" for that tree (Aimed Shot, Bestial Wrath, and Explosive Shot), or general rearranging of the tree.

PETS APLENTY

All hunters now start with a pet at level one, as determined by their race:

ALLIANCE

Human: Wolf
Night Elf: Striped Saber
Dwarf: Bear
Draenei: Moth
Worgen: Mastiff (wolf)

HORDE

Orc: Boar
Undead: Spider
Troll: Raptor
Tauren: Tallstrider
Blood Elf: Dragonhawk
Goblin: Crab

At level one, pets are always set to "Defensive," reacting only when the hunter engages an enemy. Once the hunter reaches level 10, he or she will then be able to set the pet's "attitude" to Aggressive, Defensive, or Passive, as well as issue the standard pet commands of: Attack and Follow, while Move To replaces Stay. Additionally, hunters are now able to keep a roster of 25 pets; of these 25, five pets are in the "Active" rotation, allowing the hunter to swap pets anywhere in the world, so long as the current pet is dismissed, and the stables have been greatly expanded, since they are no able to hold 20 additional pets. Pets placed in the stable will have their talent points reset.

RAID ROLE

Hunters will still remain a constant source of steady DPS for groups and raids, though the change from mana to focus should allow the hunter to perform for longer durations and keep pumping out the DPS even when the rest of the group is out of mana. Happy hunting!

Mage

The overall role of the mage in *Cataclysm*, as in any other iteration of *WoW*, is that of a damage dealer. What changes in *Cataclysm* is that the mage will be more useful to others, so much so that you might actually get a random raid invitation instead of a request to chauffeur people to one.

In addition, the introduction of class mastery in *Cataclysm* and the related changeover to a 31-point talent tree will affect mages in the same way it affects everyone else. You'll need to identify your specialization tree upfront and whatever you pick determines what special spell and bonus you will get.

NEW RACES

Dwarf, Goblin, Night Elf, Orc, Worgen

NEW MAGE SPELLS

Flame Orb: Launch a flame orb forward from the mage's position, dealing a certain amount of fire damage every second to the closest enemy target for 15 seconds. What's different about this spell is that it requires you to point in the direction of your target, which you may or may not hit depending on your aim and their ability to avoid it. The spell can be enhanced by spending at least six talent points in the Fire tree to get a 33% to 100% chance of the orb exploding at the end of the 15-second period.

Time Warp: Warp the flow of time, increasing melee, ranged, and spell casting speed by 30% for all party and raid members. It lasts for 40 seconds and is mutually exclusive with the shaman buffs, Bloodlust, and Heroism. The recipient can only get the buff once every 10 minutes. While this is a strange spell for a mage to have in her arsenal, it nevertheless increases her value in a raid.

Ring of Frost: Summon a ring of frost, taking three seconds to coalesce. Enemies entering the fully formed ring will become frozen for 10 seconds. This lasts for 12 seconds and has a 10-yard radius. Since you can't expect smart enemies to knowingly enter a forming ring of frost, this is more of a defensive spell and would be most useful in protecting squishies or perhaps battleground targets.

TALENT TREES

At the outset, mages will have to choose from three specialization paths: Arcane, Fire, or Frost. All three are damage paths, but you get 25% more damage from the spells specific to your chosen path. You also get one spell and one passive skill accordingly.

For the Arcane path, you get Arcane Barrage, which is an instant-cast spell, and Mana Adept, a passive skill that increases all spell damage output in proportion to your remaining mana. In other words, as an Arcane Mage, you'll want a really high mana pool and to practice mana conservation to be more effective.

For the Fire path, you get Pyroblast, a high-damage opening spell that also does damage over time. The related passive skill is Flashburn, which ups your periodic fire damage effects by an additional 20%.

Frost mages get the Water Elemental pet, plus Frostburn, a passive skill that increases the damage done by spells against frozen targets by an additional 20%.

RAID ROLE

Undoubtedly, Time Warp adds a new dimension to the mage's role in raids. Arcane mages will still have the raid advantage with the Arcane Tactics and Focus Magic talents, as these provide additional damage and crit buffs to party members. But with the new spell being accessible to everyone, the higher damage and better crowd control that Fire and Frost bring, respectively, might even things out.

Paladin

The paladin is getting a significant mechanic change in *Cataclysm* in the form of a Holy Power mechanic, similar to rogue combo points or Shadow priest orbs. Crusader Strike, Hammer of the Righteous, and Holy Shock build a charge of Holy Power, stacking up to three times. These charges can be released to fuel powerful abilities like Word of Glory or Inquisition. This resource is in addition to the paladin's mana pool – not in place of it.

In terms of role, the paladin is essentially unchanged. Protection paladins are still strong AoE tanks, Retribution paladins still focus on DPS, and Holy paladins are still primarily tank healers. Due to the way talent trees work in *Cataclysm*, there will be less hybridization in the past, meaning less survivability for Ret and Holy Paladins.

NEW RACES

Tauren

NEW PALADIN ABILITIES

Divine Light: A slow, expensive, large heal.

Holy Radiance: An AoE heal-over-time centered around the paladin. Good for healing packs of melee.

Guardian of Ancient Kings: A summonable "pet" on a cooldown that grants additional abilities based on the Paladin's specialization.

Inquisition: Consumes all Holy Power to increase damage by 30%, lasting four seconds for each charge consumed.

TALENT TREES

The Holy tree invokes the power of the Light to protect and to heal. While paladins have received two new AoE heals, they both have lengthy cooldowns, high mana costs, and prohibitive positioning requirements. For a paladin to provide adequate group healing, he'll need to be up front, supporting the melee pack. Otherwise, the focus continues to be on tank healing and two-target healing via Beacon of Light.

Mastery (Illuminated Healing): Your healing spells place an absorb shield on your target for 8% of the amount healed, lasting six seconds. Each point of mastery increases the amount absorbed.

Protection paladins use Holy magic to shield and defend allies from attackers. The standard rotation is changing in *Cataclysm*, now focusing on Crusader Strike and Hammer of the Righteous to build Holy Power. Attacks which spend Holy Power will generate higher threat. Protection paladins also benefit from the new Vengeance mechanic for tanks, which grants increased attack power based on damage taken.

Mastery (Divine Bulwark): Increases your chance to block melee attacks by 16%. Each point of Mastery increases block chance by an additional 2%.

Righteous crusaders who judge and punish opponents with weapons and Holy magic, Retribution paladins will worry less about mana and more about Holy Power, since Retribution now plays similarly to a rogue in terms of building and spending "points." Abilities like Crusader Strike build Holy Power, while attacks like Templar's Verdict and Divine Storm spend it. Good Retribution paladins will keep up the Inquisition buff as often as possible, while still building Holy Power quickly enough to fuel their most powerful abilities.

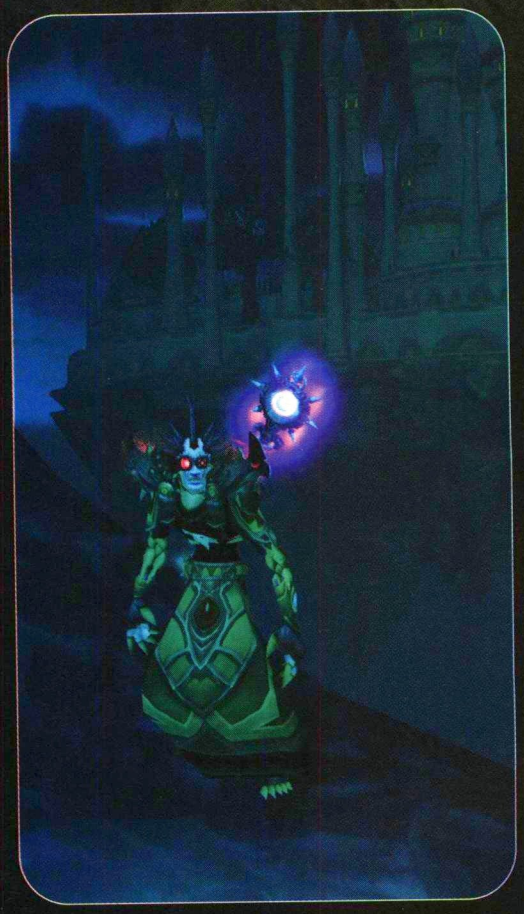
Mastery (Hand of Light): Your auto-attacks have an 8% chance to grant Hand of Light, causing your next Holy Power ability to consume no Holy Power and to cast as if three Holy Power were consumed. Each point of Mastery increases the chance by an additional 1%.

RAID ROLE

Paladin raid roles remain relatively unchanged in *Cataclysm*. While Holy paladins have gained a few additional tools for group healing, it remains largely a tank/healing specialization. Protection and Retribution paladins will perform the same roles as they did in Wrath of the Lich King, though Blizzard plans on changing their rotations to be more involved with the fights.

BY ERIC PETERSON

Priest



In *Cataclysm*, the role of the priest remains essentially unchanged. The priest is a strong healing class at its core, with the ability to focus on healing, shadow damage, or absorption and preventative damage. The *Cataclysm* approach to healing differs significantly from the Wrath of the Lich King model: larger health pools, lower mana regeneration, and more expensive spell costs ultimately means a slower, more tactical approach to healing. Mana management is back; Players will be forced to choose the correct spell for any given situation or risk draining their resources too early in the fight.

NEW RACES

Gnome, Goblin, Tauren, Worgen

NEW PRIEST SPELLS

Heal: Once considered a low-level precursor to Greater Heal, this spell has been revamped for *Cataclysm*. This spell heals for a modest amount, and has a medium cast time compared to Flash Heal or Greater Heal. It's very mana-efficient and considered a "standard" heal for most situations.

Mind Spike: A powerful nuke that deals Shadowfrost damage and increases the critical strike chance of your next Mind Blast by 30%. Stacks up to three times. This ability is spammable, causes a high amount of threat, and deals damage equivalent to casting Mind Flay on a target afflicted with Shadow Word: Pain.

Inner Will: A new buff that reduces the mana cost of instant cast spells by 15% and increases movement speed by 10%. This buff doesn't stack with Inner Fire, so players will have to choose between increased armor and spellpower and increased mobility and efficiency.

Leap of Faith: An instant-cast spell with a 40-yard range that pulls an ally directly in front of the caster. This spell functions similarly to the death knight's Death Grip ability, but targets friendly players rather than hostile players.

TALENT TREES

Discipline priests uses magic to shield allies from taking damage as well as heal their wounds. Players have the option of favoring a Power Word: Shield/Heal rotation, reducing the Weakened Soul timer, or playing more offensively with the new Smite talents. Penance is back as the tree-defining skill, and can be cast more frequently when used between Smites.

Shadow priests use sinister Shadow magic, especially damage-over-time spells, to eradicate enemies. Priests have a new Shadow Orbs mechanic, gaining orbs by casting Shadow Word: Pain and Mind Flay, and these orbs increase the damage done by Mind Blast and Mind Spike. Notable additions include the Paralysis and Shadowy Apparition talents, which encourage kiting.

A versatile healer, the Holy priest can reverse damage on individuals or groups and even heal from beyond the grave. The Chakra ability allows priests to focus on a particular spell – Heal, Renew, Prayer of Healing, or Smite – allowing them to boost the performance of one ability. Power Word: Chastise is a new Holy ability; it functions as a three-second daze but is transformed into a powerful healing spell depending on your Chakra state.

RAID ROLE

The priest still has the ability to function as a healer or a DPS class, depending on its spec. Holy remains a raid healing specialization, while Discipline now has two possible roles. They can function as either a tank healer, or a Smite-based hybrid that offers moderate DPS and healing.

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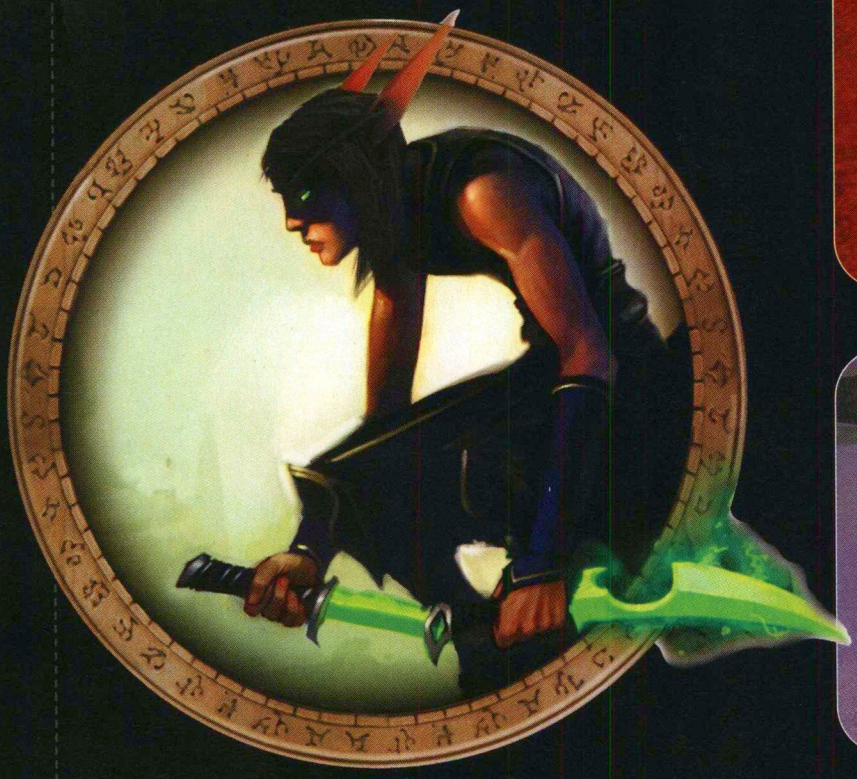
BY STEPHEN "SPRAWL" RUSSELL

Rogue



Rogues receive a few tweaks here and there with *Cataclysm*, but nothing game-changing. Like many of the other classes, we've got a slimmed-down talent system, new glyphs, and a couple of new abilities to learn past level 80. While rogues do receive a number of new defensive abilities, which imply longer battles with larger health pools, our primary role continues to be dishing out the damage.

NEW RACES

Goblin, Worgen

NEW ROGUE ABILITIES

For high-level rogues, players pick up a few new abilities like Combat Readiness, Redirect, and the highly anticipated Smoke Bomb. In a world (of *Warcraft*) where every class has some sort of stun move, having Combat Readiness to use instead of Evasion is huge. This ability lets you absorb damage rather than avoid it. Likewise, rogues have a new ability, called Redirect, that allows the rogue to transfer combo points from one target to another. Currently, this ability is rather cumbersome and hard to use. The current version lacks visual cues, but rogues have been asking for this ability for quite a while, so hopefully it will be fine-tuned before launch day.

What rogue hasn't heard about Smoke Bomb yet? This ability is acquired at level 85 and is everything we hoped it was going to be. With Smoke Bomb, rogues now have the ability to create a line-of-sight obstruction. The enemy can still target the rogue, but can't cast spells into or out of the smoke. Likewise, this ability can be used on enemy healers. Put a smoke bomb around their target and all of the sudden the healer can't save them! The possibilities are endless.

Last but not least, all rogues will be picking up the new healing finishing move called Recuperate. This ability gives you the option of spending combo points to apply a heal-over-time (HoT) to your rogue. For a few additional combo points, the ability can be further enhanced to the point of being arguably overpowered. On the beta servers, rogues are facing elite enemies a few levels above them without batting an eyelash. This will most likely change before release.

TALENT TREES

With the talent trees redesigned, a number of fluff talents have been removed. For example, that +5% to critical strike talent that everyone used to use is gone. Instead, all rogues receive a boost to critical strike. Is it really an option if you must take it? All three trees have been stripped of the fat and players will now receive class-defining abilities as soon as they select a specialization at level 10. This means Assassination rogues will be Mutilating right off the bat, Combat rogues will be using Blade Flurry, and Subtlety rogues will be able to Shadowstep. This is a huge change for low-level Rogue play!

RAID ROLE

For your raiding rogues that aren't really interested in rolling a new character, our place in raids remains much the same. We have some new tricks to absorb damage, so expect the return of the 360-degree boss cleaves and other AoE moves that will force us to spend combo points on Recuperate for healing purposes. What really remains to be seen is whether Blizzard will be able to bring Subtlety raid damage up to par with the other two trees without homogenizing them too much. One can always hope!

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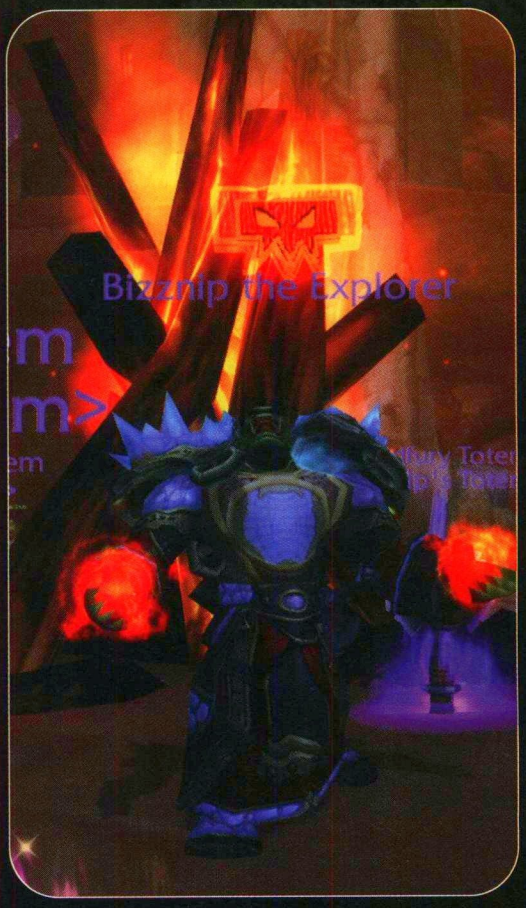
BY ERIC PETERSON

Shaman



The shaman is back with some new and improved tools in *Cataclysm*, but the overall feel will be familiar to veteran players. The mechanics and roles of the class have not changed dramatically, and players will still be able to specialize in melee DPS, ranged DPS, or healing, depending on their choice of talents.

NEW RACES

Dwarf, Goblin

NEW SHAMAN SPELLS

Primal Strike: A weapon-based attack designed to give Enhancement shamans an early leveling tool.

Healing Wave: The old Healing Wave spell has been renamed Greater Healing Wave. The new Healing Wave is an efficient medium heal, in between Lesser Healing Wave and Greater Healing Wave.

Unleash Elements: A spell that unleashes the power in the shaman's weapons, depending on which weapon buff the player has active.

Healing Rain: An AoE heal-over-time ability that affects all players within range.

Spiritwalker's Grace: A self-buff that allows shamans to cast non-instant spells while on the move.

Cleanse Spirit: A defensive dispel, to compensate for the loss of Cleansing Totem. Can be improved via the Restoration tree.

TALENT TREES

Elemental shamans will continue to deal out heavy burst ranged damage, while simultaneously buffing the spell damage of their party. Totem of Wrath is now a baseline spell for all shamans; Elemental shamans gain access to the Totemic Wrath talent, which provides an additional spell power bonus to the raid. Lightning Shield has an additional use; it can now be used to power up Earth Shock, increasing its damage through the Fulmination talent.

Mastery (Elemental Overload): Grants a 16% chance for Elemental Overload to occur. Elemental Overload causes a Lightning Bolt, Chain Lightning, or Lava Burst spell you cast to trigger a second, similar, spell on the same target at no additional cost that causes 75% of normal damage and no threat. Each point of mastery increases the chance of Elemental Overload by 2%.

The Enhancement shaman is a totemic warrior who strikes foes with weapons imbued with elemental power. This tree will continue to improve melee DPS, though Blizzard is adding in additional uses for spell power. Enhancement shamans are compensated for their need to focus on multiple attack stats by receiving spell power equal to 50% of their attack power, and a 75% reduction in the mana cost of instant spells.

Mastery (Enhanced Elements): Increases all Fire, Frost, and Nature damage done by 20%. Each point of Mastery increases damage by an additional 2%.

The Restoration shaman is currently the dominant AoE healer; only Holy priests provide any real competition. The Focused Insight talent encourages shamans to mix Shock spells into their rotation, by increasing the potency of the next heal and reducing its mana cost. Ancestral Healing improves single-target healing by reducing your target's damage taken after a critical heal.

Mastery (Deep Healing): Increases the potency of your direct healing spells by up to 20%, based on the current health level of your target (lower health targets are healed for more).

RAID ROLE

Restoration shamans will continue to be raid healers. Elemental and Enhancement shamans will continue their roles as caster and melee DPS classes, respectively, though the Enhancement shaman will take on a stronger casting role than in previous expansions.

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BY JAMIE MCKINNON

Warlock

The most significant change to the warlock in *Cataclysm* is the revamp of the old soul shard mechanics. Instead of harvesting and hauling around an enormous satchel of former enemies' souls, warlocks will have three soul shards built directly into the user interface. They can be regenerated quickly when out of combat and can be used to empower a wide variety of the warlock's spells to reap greater damage or inflict additional effects upon enemies.

NEW RACES

Dwarf, Goblin, Troll, Worgen

NEW WARLOCK SPELLS

Fel Flame: Green fire! Fel Flame is an instant cast "shadowflame" – it uses the lesser of the target's Shadow or Fire resistance and refreshes the duration of Immolate and Unstable Affliction while you melt faces on the move.

Dark Intent: A new buff that increases a friendly player's and the warlock's haste by 3%. While the warlock and her target are linked, any critical strike from DoTs or heals will increase periodic damage and healing by 3% for both parties.

Demon Soul: Demon Soul merges the souls of the warlock and her demon. This union grants the warlock special abilities depending on the demon in use when the spell is activated.

TALENT TREES

Some of the most exciting changes to look forward to in Affliction are Jinx, Soul Swap, and Soulburn: Seed of Corruption. Jinx will apply Curse of Elements to every enemy within 40 yards. Soul Swap allows the warlock to strip DoTs from one target and quickly place them on another. Seed of Corruption allows for a Soulburn empowerment that causes Seed of Corruption's detonation to cover all enemy targets in Corruption.

Mastery (Potent Afflictions): Increases all periodic shadow damage you deal by 13.04%. Additional points in Mastery increase periodic shadow damage by an additional 1.63%.

The Demonologist's Hand of Gul'dan will lob a meteor that places a four-yard aura, causing all targets within it to have a 10% greater chance of being critically struck by the warlock's demons. Aura of Foreboding makes Hand of Gul'dan even more effective by allowing the warlock to root and stun enemies who stay inside the aura. Further down, Inferno increases the radius of Hellfire by 10 yards, in addition to allowing it to be channeled while moving. Finally, Cremation will increase Hellfire's damage by 30% as well as empowering Hand of Gul'dan to refresh Immolate on the target.

Mastery (Master Demonologist): Increases the damage done by your demon servants and the damage you deal while transformed into a demon by 12%. Each point of mastery increases this damage by an additional 1.5%

On the Destruction end of the table, Nether Ward, when used in conjunction with Nether Protection, shelters the warlock from 30% of the damage from any spell school that triggers the defensive proc for 12 seconds. Bane of Havoc is an entirely new spell that works somewhat like an inversion of the Holy paladin's Beacon of Light. When a target is Baned, 15% of the damage done to any other target will also be transferred to the recipient of Bane of Havoc.

Mastery (Fiery Apocalypse): Increase all fire damage you deal by 10%. Each point of mastery increases fire damage by an additional 1.25%.

RAID ROLE

The warlock's raid role in *Cataclysm* remains essentially unchanged. Warlocks will bring more utility to the group with their first significant direct buff, Dark Intent. Each specialization of the Warlock will perform familiar functions in both PvE and PvP, albeit with a revamped soul shard system and a huge new bag of tricks for empowering and augmenting their spells.

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BY JAY BIANCO

Warrior

With *Cataclysm* comes change – change that's so massive, especially for the warrior class, that it would take an entire magazine devoted solely to the changes and we probably wouldn't even come close to getting them all. Blizzard has overhauled all of the trees and is basically forcing people to specialize. What this means for us all is that everyone has to relearn their class – and if you've read the rest of my articles, you'll know that my fondest hope is that they'll all learn how to actually *play* this time around.

NEW RACES

Blood Elf, Goblin, Worgen

NEW WARRIOR ABILITIES

Colossus Smash: Smashes target for weapon damage plus 126, and allows all damage to bypass armor for 6 seconds.

Inner Rage: Whenever you reach full 100 Rage, you'll get a buff that causes attacks to consume 50% more Rage and do 15% more damage for a short period of time.

Heroic Leap: This one makes you leap through the air to your victim and slam to the ground with a Thunderclap. Heroic Leap will be usable in Battle Stance and shares a cooldown with Charge, but the Juggernaut and Warbringer talents are supposed to allow Heroic Leap to be used in any stance and they may even let you do it in combat. The cooldown might be longer than Charge, but it will also apply a stun effect so you can make sure the target will still be there when you land. This just rocks and will go a long way toward helping warriors deal with the handicap of having every idiot in the game kite the snot out of you – and it looks damn cool.

TALENT TREES

With the new Protection tree, you'll be able to have an interesting tanking experience, oddly enough. With the way Blizzard went and built the trees, you'll *feel* like a tank. You can take a considerable amount of damage, and still hit like a small Buick, and it works great in PvP.

The Arms tree hands you some great sustainable damage without sacrificing survivability too much. You won't be able to handle the beatings a tank could, but if you play this tree right, you'll be a beast on the field. You could go for a little more survivability by throwing the rest into Protection, or you could give yourself a decent boost in damage by slapping the rest into Fury. Again, this works in PvP!

Damage? Check. Major burst in plate? Check. Low survivability and high reliance on healers to maximize this damage? Check. Yes, Fury is a great tree for damage, and it's wicked cool to have dual-two-handers, but if you want major burst DPS, then roll a rogue. To me, going all Fury is a waste and, one-on-one, you'll eat dirt a lot – basically, there's still no wiggle room with this spec.

RAID ROLE

You can spec down the two DPS trees; if you don't plan to take damage, then Fury works, but if you get hit, you'll go down faster than a night elf in the Tram. You can go Arms, still deal solid damage overall, and help out by being an off-tank option. Protection is, obviously, the tanking spec. The trees are very specialized now, and this is a good thing because it forces people to play or reroll.

All in all, the Warrior is back to being a beast and something to fear on the battlefield, so please, don't screw it up by being bad at it in this expansion, too.

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BY JAY BIANCO

Kill 'em All:

Your Guide to GANKING Hybrid Classes in World of Warcraft

Searing Totem
<Bizznip's Totem>
Lightning Shield
Instant
Surrounds you with lightning orbs, damaging enemies when they strike you. Best used as a preparation before entering battle.
Redhippo creates Chaotic Skyfire Diamond

Cheap? Overpowered? I call them "Lunch" We're coming to an end of our Ganking Class Guide journey, kids. And I think we've been pretty successful in picking apart every class in the game, so why waste time with an introduction when we're so close to getting to the really fun articles: multiplayer ganks, guild gank squads, and battleground ganks!

TARGET: HYBRIDS

So now we're at what we call hybrid classes in *WoW*, namely the shaman, the hunter, and the druid. Many people complain that these particular classes are cheap or overpowered due to their play mechanics. The truth is, they call them such because they need an excuse for being ganked by some dude that turns into a wolf, a gimp that uses pets while they flutter around plinking arrows, or some weenie in a leather dress that touches his animal-loving tendencies by shape-shifting every three seconds into a cheetah to run their asses out of town. Yes, I cursed. Maturity was thrown out of the window the second you decided you wanted to gank people, pal. Don't judge me. I'm a born New Yorker – I'm surprised I lasted this long.

HOW TO GANK THE SHAMAN

I actually really enjoy this class and it's quite strong if played right – like everything in the game. But this is why you're here! You need to know how to gank these guys so you don't end up eating dirt, and with a class that wears chainmail, has some pretty brutal offensive spells, tosses down annoying totems, can melee with the best of them and can heal themselves up to full before you can blink, it's not exactly an easy win like ganking a paladin is.

Make sure you really pay attention to these guys. Take your time to scout them out and watch for a couple of minutes. Let them go into their rotation a few times, see how they handle themselves and then you can plan the perfect gank. Keep your eyes on the totems they drop, and you can get a great feel for their ability. It has to be fast or you're dead meat. So keep your eye on their mana and confidence… or stupidity. If they're out there mana-dumping to the point that they have to drink up after every fight, chances are solid they're not too bright because they think they're just so damned good. Here's a hint: they're not. No one that's good at PvP will leave themselves so helpless by dumping their main resource to fight, heal, or escape. So when they're low on mana (i.e., below 50 mana – not 50%, 50 points), jump in there and school them! If you have abilities that can hit the shaman and

possibly nail the totems, do it. Those things can turn the tide of battle real quick. Watch for green spells; those are heals. Interrupt those while trying not to eat lightning and you should be OK. If they shift into Ghost Wolf form, they're trying to escape – they're terrified and panicked and they're going to lose. If you lose when they're at this point, you should probably roll this issue up and smack yourself across the face a few times because you haven't paid attention to anything I've told you.

HOW TO GANK AS A SHAMAN

Totems. Very simple here, kids. Use your tools to the utmost efficiency and don't leave yourself dry. If you find yourself in a situation where you're getting jumped, or if you're out and about actively looking for prey, don't be a fool and blow your entire load in a fight. Slap down your PvP set of totems and go to town! You have to hold something in reserve, whether it's a mana potion or not. I highly recommend saving potions for the health emergency over mana – casts can be interrupted and they can lock out the entire healing school of magic and that mana pot is wasted. Besides, you have totems for all that. Pick the best ones for your style and ability, have them hot-keyed, and when you're in a battle, drop those bad boys down!

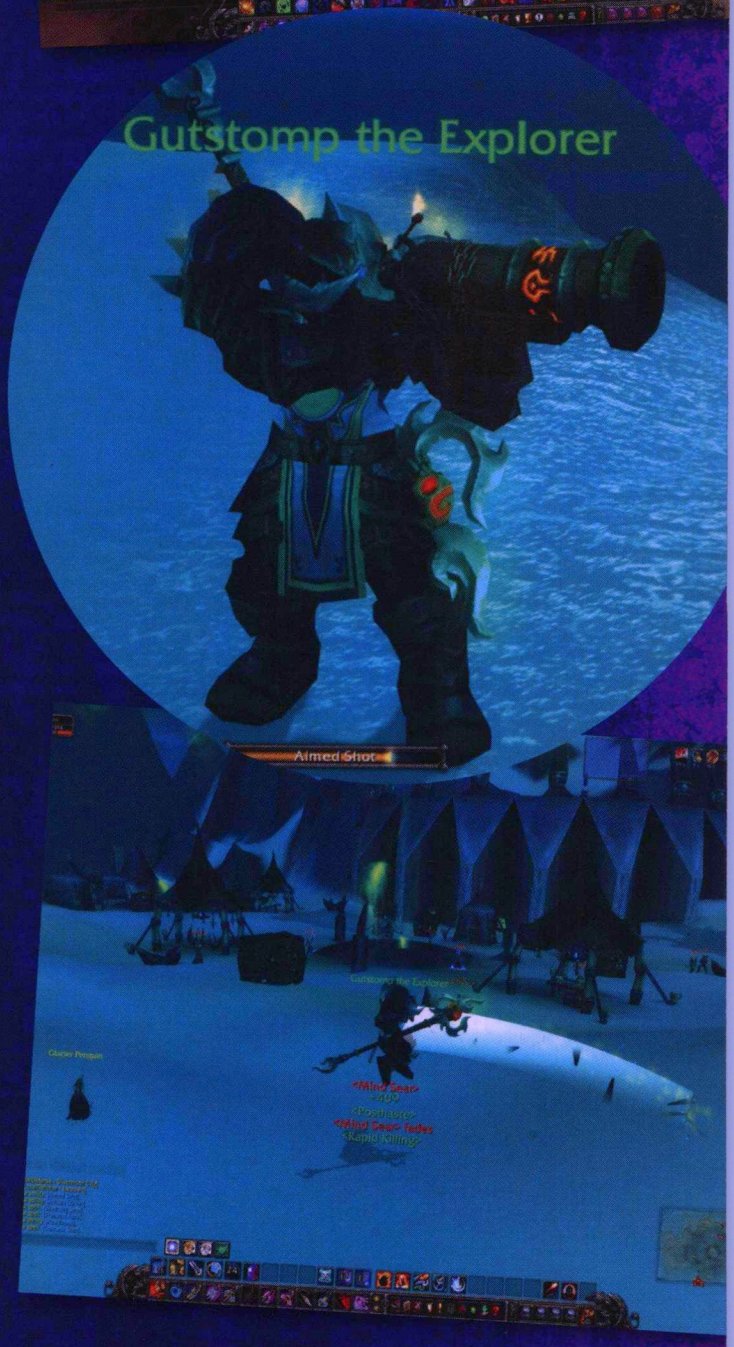
"WITH A SHAMAN, YOU CAN EFFECTIVELY JUMP MULTIPLE TARGETS AND COME OUT ON TOP – IT'S INSANE."

Anyway, use that melee, use those offensive badass spells and use Ghostwolf. Yes, you've read right. Use that travel form offensively to kite the hell out of any melee you jump, or use it to screw with any ranged you come across. If you get a runner, shift into it and go get them! You've won. The simple fact here is you can heal, so if played right, you can win just by waiting them out, but you shouldn't go that route. With a shaman, you can effectively jump multiple targets and come out on top – it's insane. Melee won't be able to abuse you up close due to the fact that you're wearing chainmail and not a dress. Ranged won't be able to outdamage your healing, and when their mana is gone, you've won. You have totems to deal with any possible situation. Make sure you're prepared for each class type (ranged, melee, hybrid) and you're golden. Yes the micro-management of the totems is a royal pain, but not only has Blizzard made handling them much easier (I used to gank back in the day when you had to click each one individually!), but the extra time you spend preparing will make you feel godly. And this is ganking – you should always be prepared.

HOW TO GANK THE HUNTER

More chain-wearing ranged guys. They have some decent pets that can distract you, they have traps that can allow them to either escape if they're cowards or turn the tables on you if they're good, so don't fall for any of them. Ignore the damned pet, save your trinkets to escape their "oh crap I'm going to die" traps, and stay on top of them like white on rice. If you let a hunter get away from you, you're done. They can hit oddly hard for a ranged class in chainmail, and even though they have access to so many weapons in the game, their melee is garbage. Yes I said garbage. I don't care what spec someone told you works for melee Hunters. Nothing does. If you want to melee why are you playing a hunter?

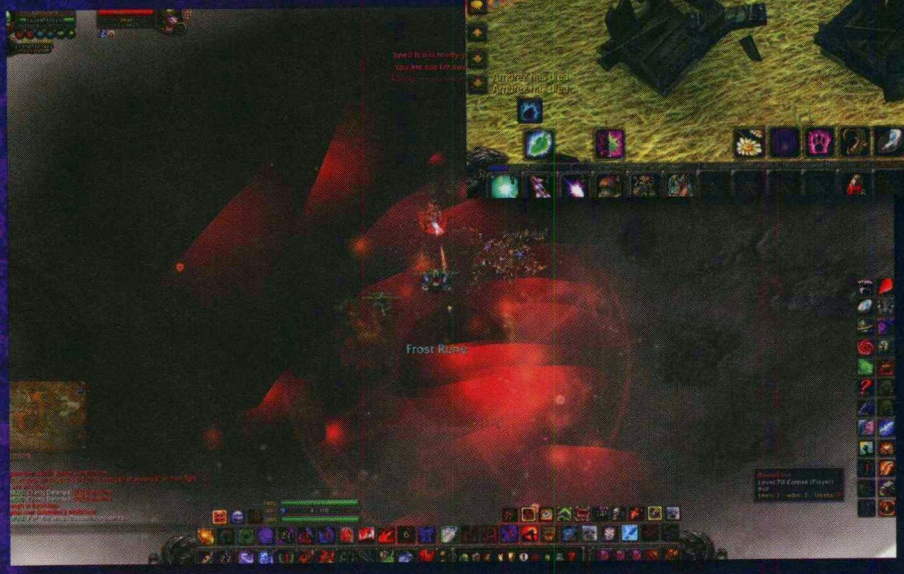
So get in on them. Save your best closing tricks for after they pop their Disengage, because while they have the tools to widen the distance, most hunters use them all wrong. And keep your eyes open for Feign Death.



Again, it's an ability they pop all too soon and all too often, but you'd be shocked at how many people fall for it after all these years.

HOW TO GANK AS A HUNTER

Slap some traps down, save your best "oops" tricks for big problems, and shoot them in the face. But don't get cocky! If you get ahead of yourself – and with a hunter that's very easy – you'll find yourself with every good escape move on cooldown and then you're done. Use that pet to distract them. 99% of the people fall for it, and while they're busy dividing their attention between you and the pet, you can pop some interesting moves to utterly murder them. If you're quick enough to Feign Death, slap a trap down and Disengage. You'll manage to change their targeting cursor to your pet, immobilize them, and get far enough away to have more than enough time to decide what you want to do – continue the fight, run away, or my favourite: Make them think you're running away only to turn around and kite them, abusing line of sight and your most powerful-yet-quick shots to make them wonder what exactly just happened.



HOW TO GANK THE DRUID

These guys are almost as big a joke as the paladin. They can abuse their shape-shifting to get out of any immobilizing effect while everyone else needs to mostly rely on trinkets, and they can stand there and impressively heal like mad through some major damage while kiting the hell out of you. Don't fall for it. Keep them silenced and keep them snared. If they're busy shape-shifting to try and widen the gap because you're constantly slowing or rooting them, they won't have time to cast offensive spells (never mind heals). Silence is your friend again, but you have to keep up on the snares and roots because this class heavily relies on its ability to get the hell out of Dodge. What they'll do when you jump them is instantly shift into a Cheetah and take off, so stay on them! If you let them get away, they're going to get far enough away to just gain control.

If, while they're booking for it, they suddenly vanish, well they've shifted into their DPS mode and stealthed. So you're dealing with a half-assed rogue that can heal, run away, and turn into a wannabe-tank. This is why you have to stay on top of them more than any other class in the game. Don't let them get a second to breathe or they'll get away from you and what should have been an easy kill turns into you wasting time while you chase down Mary in a leather dress running down the road.

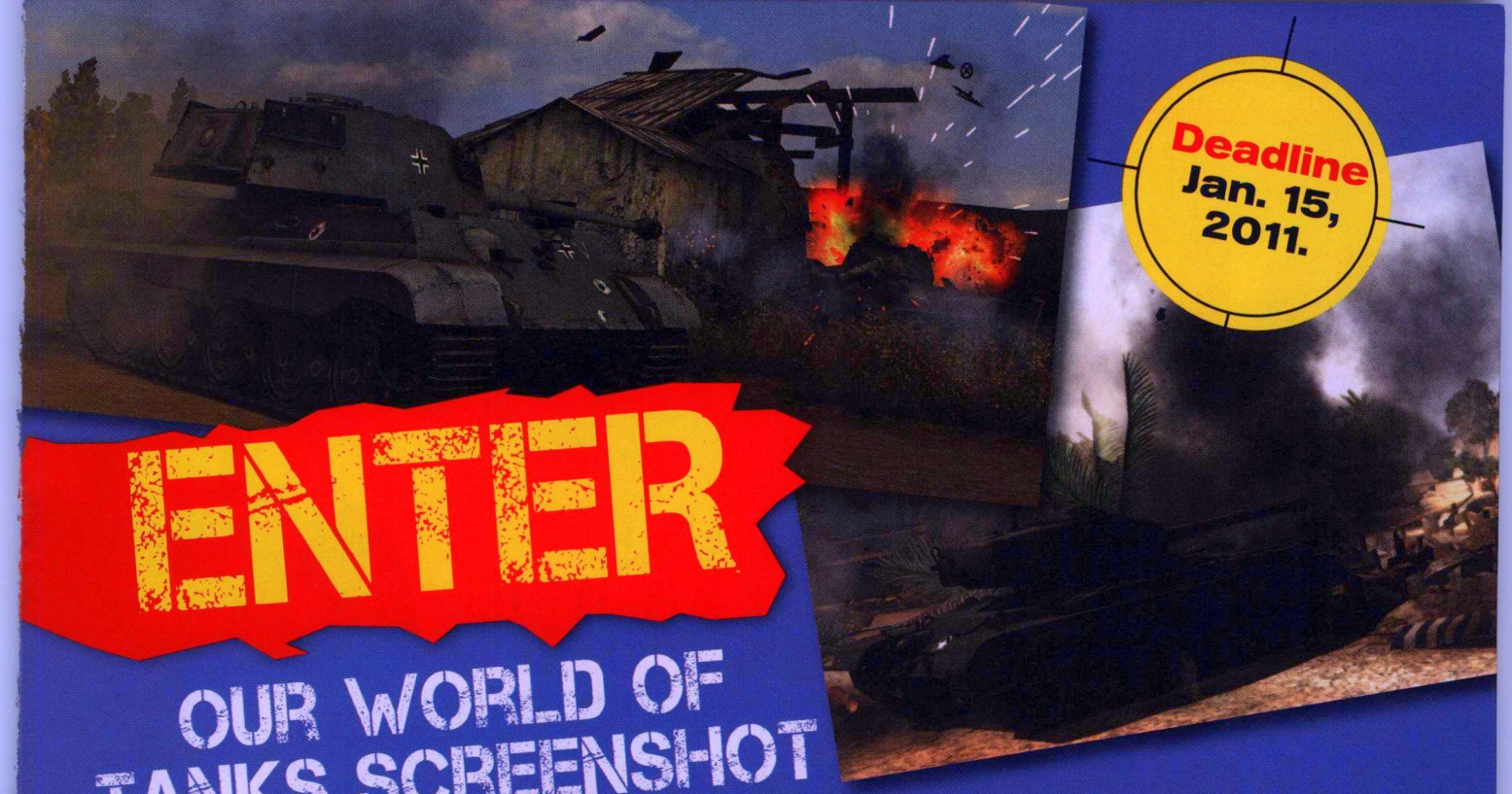
HOW TO GANK AS A DRUID

Overkill is my choice for using these guys. You can tank decently, you can stealth and DPS decently, and you can heal like a mother-effer on crack while running circles around everyone else because they can't seem to keep you rooted or snared. What I find particularly fun to do is stealth around on the target, get into a good position, freak them out a bit if they hear that familiar stealth-sound *WoW* has, and when you're ready pop hurricane on them! Man, will it piss them off to no end! Sure you're starting a gank with a crowd control move, but it's a move that will let your target see the incoming death, and the only thing that's worse than getting ganked is knowing you're about to bite it and there's not a damned thing they can do about it. Toy with them – after all, you're reading this to learn how to grief people by ganking them. This is an important part of that! Use it! Then kite, kite, kite. Abuse line of sight, abuse the terrain, use every kind of annoying and amusing ability you have to make the death downright frustrating and agonizing for the other player. Obviously, I don't have to tell you to watch it and don't leave yourself open for their pals to come and smoke you because you've decided to take a half an hour to kill one schmuck… right?

TO BE CONTINUED...

Now that we've reached the end of the class by class gank guide, we're going to move into some rather interesting gank scenarios. Guild gank squads are pretty self-explanatory, but did you know that you can gank in battlegrounds? Yep. And the result is almost more amusing than ganking random weenies on your own server out in the open world.

Until next time, stay ganky, my friends.



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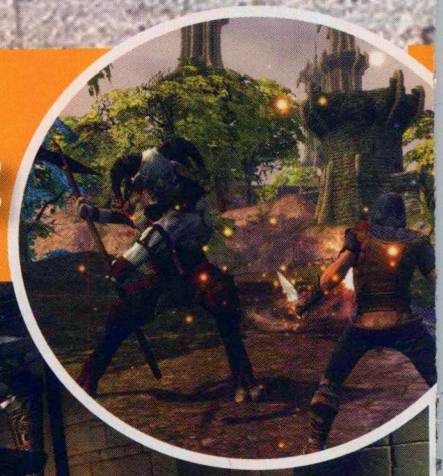
* Attempts will be made to provide properly sized T-shirts to winners.

BY JASON WINTER

DEVELOPER

RIFT: PLANES OF TELARA: +1 PLEA FOR LESS SUCK HERE!

By Scott Hartsman, Executive Producer, Rift: Planes of Telara



There's this profound shift that happens to a game when it stops being a program you're building internally every day that a few dozen developers are logging in to, and it starts being this thing that total strangers are playing day in and day out. It's like a dress rehearsal for the real thing – you know that the big show is coming all too soon.

From the outside, there's often a perception that we invite people who are inclined to bolster our egos and do nothing but send lavish compliments our way. After all, that must be why we call early testing "Friends and Family," right? We just want the compliments! Bring on the fanboys and fangirls!

That couldn't be further from the truth -- It's that we're generally more comfortable falling down in front of the people who are the most likely to forgive us for making them suffer through these rough teething experiences that all games go through.

In fact, game developers are generally their own worst critics. We all want to make the best game that we possibly can, and that can only happen when people are being brutally honest with each other. What a lot of people don't realize is that the blunt feedback goes on long before the first outsider ever gets a look.

To wit, here's an old sampling from the *Rift: Planes of Telara* playtest mailing list, which the entire team sees:

- "+1 plea for less suck here."
- "It's not making me feel tough as much as making the game feel easy and stupid."
- "Lame, lame, lame, lame."
- "The battle was comically anticlimactic."
- "I was actively saddened by this experience."
- "This looks like crap."

This is developers talking to the same people they work with, day in and day out, and the people we've invited in to help us create our own slice of awesome. In many cases, the readers know where you sit every day.

Why the hell would any sane person put themselves through this? Maybe it's because…

- "We just played for 5 hours straight together and are loving the gameplay!"
- "To say the game is highly polished would be an understatement."
- "I feel like I should be paying to test this game. Seriously."
- "I love it so much I canceled my other accounts and don't plan on activating them again."

...when you do finally let some strangers in, and they say that? It really makes all the agony worthwhile. :)

When you give yourself permission to fall down, and the right audience to do it in front of, you're able to pick yourself up, band together, and make sure that everything is the absolute best that it can be by the time it matters.

We owe it to everyone who will eventually play the game to give them our best, and nothing less.

CONFIDENTIAL

GODS & HEROES: RISING FROM THE ASHES

By Tim Schubert, Lead Designer

It was impossible to not immediately see amazing potential in *Gods & Heroes* when we first got a look to see if we wanted to buy the project and revive the game. Not only was *Gods & Heroes* beautiful, it had a great setting, a clever gameplay hook in its minions, and an excited following. We knew there was a lot work to be done, but the decision to pick up *Gods & Heroes* was easy; here was a game that needed saving and Heatwave was in the unique position of having the MMO experience, desire, and will to make it happen.

Now, that being said, *Gods & Heroes* has been a challenge. There's an almost unfathomable amount to learn about making any MMO tick and, as with most, this one didn't come with an instruction manual. The discovery process has slowed our game development, but we have made tremendous progress. We already have the server supporting significantly more players than it ever had before. We've updated the game art and embraced the power of modern hardware to raise the visual bar. *Gods & Heroes* won't just receive superficial upgrades, either. We're working to ensure the game systems and content make the game fun, instead of just keeping players busy.

Gods & Heroes was already a good game when we took it over and we don't need to fundamentally reinvent it. The game is still about venturing out with your minions and battling all sorts of mythological baddies while collecting some amazing loot. We're putting our own flavor into everything as we update the game, but our primary goal is to simply make sure the fun factor is cranked all the way up.

WORLD OF TANKS: A TANK FOR ALL SEASONS

By Sergi Burkatovsky, Chief Game Designer

World of Tanks will feature fighting vehicles designed from the early '30s and up to the late '40s. We've chosen this particular era because this was the golden age of tankbuilding and the time when the concept of a modern tank was developed.

As tanks are the main characters in the game, and we thoroughly recreated them using drafts, blueprints, and pictures of the vehicles that existed in WWII. Even those machines that existed only as prototypes and never left factory gates or training grounds will be present in *World of Tanks*.

The game will contain several classes of vehicles corresponding to real-life warfare. These include light, medium, and heavy tanks. There will also be tank destroyers and artillery, the "gods of war." Every class of units has its own features and the variety of models presented adds to versatility of *World of Tanks* gameplay.

Light tanks are perfect scouts, capable of surfing through the battlefield and detecting enemy positions. They are very light and have little armor, which provides high top speed and agility. Apart from that, the role of light tanks is to seek and destroy enemy artillery. The sooner they manage to do that, the easier it will be for their team to finish the other units.

Medium tanks are the universal soldiers. Their strongest points are flanking attacks and coordinated actions in groups of three or four. Once gathered, a squad of medium tanks becomes the deadliest weapon of any team.

Heavy tanks are natural-born killing machines. Thick armor guaranties they'll live long, and big guns will bring devastation and chaos to rivals. However, this is balanced by huge weight and lack of speed and maneuverability.

Tank destroyers are indispensable when it comes to defense and ambushes. With powerful weapons and thick frontal armor, they're capable of engaging enemy vehicles from relatively long distances. But their weak points are low mobility, non-rotating turrets and deficit of side and rear armor.

The role of self-propelled howitzers is slightly different. They work in tense cooperation with light tanks that scout the map and unveil enemy vehicles for them. Their hugely powerful guns can create a one-shot lethal outcome for any opponent. Still, they're very vulnerable in close combat.

All the fighting vehicles will have a great number of different modifications available. After exploring and buying a new vehicle, you can upgrade its main elements, such as gun, turret, engine, radio, and chassis. You begin with a default vehicle modification, and by gaining experience and credits in battles, you can unlock and install better elements, thus upgrading your machine.

When developing the damage model, we focused on making it detailed, precise, and close to real-life conditions. When a shell hits a tank, multiple factors are taken into consideration, including shell caliber, armor type, thickness and angle, and the impact zone – i.e., damaging an ammo rack or fuel tank may cause the enemy's entire vehicle to detonate, while delivering a hit to a track will immobilize a tank until the track is fixed.

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Poll Results

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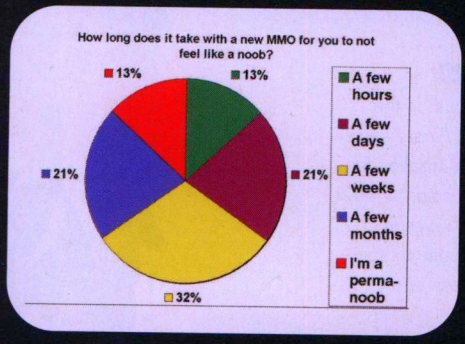
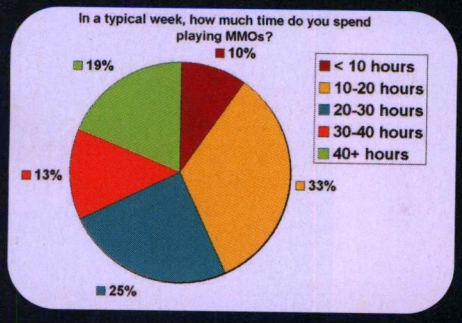


Play Time



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BY CAROLYN KOH

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Developer insights and first impressions of Final Fantasy XIV

Final Fantasy XIV boldly goes where no *Final Fantasy* has gone before. It's not a continuation of where *Final Fantasy XI* left off, as MMO players might think. It's not set in the same world of *FFXI* like *EverQuest 2* is set in Norrath, or Guild Wars 2 will be set in Tyria. Instead, *FFXIV* is set in a new world with a new setting, new cast of characters, and new career and combat system.

"Like every *Final Fantasy* installment, the world is different," said Yasu Kurosawa, North American online producer at Square Enix.

"Except for chocobos!" chuckled Global Online Producer Sage Sundi.

"And moogles!" Kurosawa interjected, joining in the laughter.

"They are the same, but still different!" claimed Sundi.

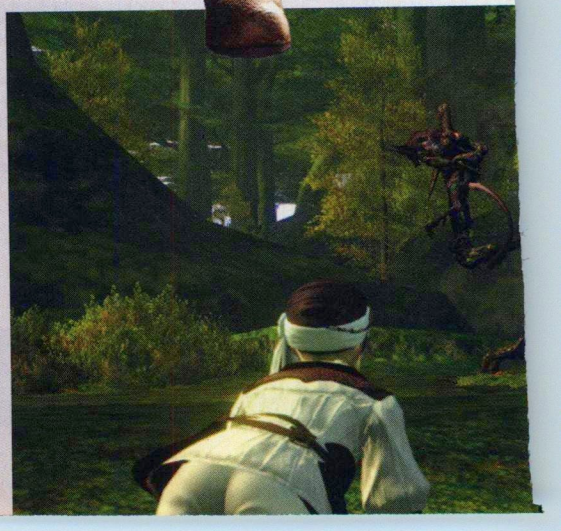
Same but different

That seems to sum up the driving design document at Square Enix for *Final Fantasy*. Each major installment is set in a different world from the previous and yet each features some identical elements that define the game. These include plot themes, character names, musical themes, and iconic creatures like moogles: small, plump, magical, flying creatures with a single antenna springing from their heads; and chocobos, large flightless birds used as mounts and the cat-girl player avatar, a female humanoid with cat ears, a snub nose, and a tail. Instead of Vana'diel, it has Eorzea. Instead of mithra – the playable cat-girl race – it has miqo'te.

But fans of *FFXI* will recognize many aspects of *FFXIV*. "We wanted to create a familiar world for players of *FFXI*," explained Kurosawa. "So although their backgrounds are different, the races look quite the same."

Character customization

In *Final Fantasy XIV*, there's a focus on the uniqueness of one's character. For a *Final Fantasy* product, there are quite a bit of customization features in character creation, from hair color to facial marks. Where it mainly manifests however, is in the Armoury system. Players can choose to specialize in only one skill or make free use of the



many choices offered by the Armoury.

"The classes are your basic MMO classes," said Kurosawa, "You have your healer, melee, buff, and debuff, your ranged and your magic users, and your harvesting and crafting."

The main difference comes in how easily you can shift between the classes. Switching your class is as simple as switching your primary weapon. Hold a pole-arm and you're a lancer. Hold a skillet and you're a culinarian. However, unlike the previous job system in FFXI, where you actually switched classes – and that had to be done in specific locales – in FFXIV, you're leveling skills and abilities. "It's not just a job change," said Sundi. "You retain your abilities, so even if you take up a sword and you've learned to heal, you can still heal yourself."

Players still make a choice when they begin the game, however, to determine what they begin with, since you aren't simply given one of each weapon or a tool of every class – and there are many to choose from. The classes in *FFXIV* are divided into four broad categories: disciples of war, which include the pugilist, marauder, gladiator, archer, and lancer; disciples of magic, which include the conjuror and the thaumaturge; disciples of the land, which include the miner, botanist, and fisher; and disciples of the hand, which include armourer, blacksmith, goldsmith, carpenter, leatherworker, culinarian, alchemist, and weaver. There seems to be a surfeit of crafting classes, and this is by design. Square Enix has gone out of its way to create independent crafting classes which will play a large role in the player economy.

Auto-attack isn't a choice in combat and spamming skills will probably get you killed faster. Timing is crucial, since you have to chain combos with your groupmates. Harvesting and crafting is much the same, involving a mini-game that requires you to aim before you hack at a tree, jig to set the hook and reel in a fish, or patiently stabilize an alchemy recipe as it synthesizes.

Questing in Eorzea

There are three basic types of quests in *FFXIV*: local quests that are tied to a locality, like a town or guild; storyline quests, which are the larger overarching quests (the ones that rate the pretty cutscenes); and guildleves. Guildleves are tokens handed out to adventurers. Rectangular plates made of stained crystal set into a frame of precious metal, each depicts a virtuous deed of one of Eorzea's patron saints, and each gives the adventure "leave" to take whatever steps necessary to complete the jobs, including entry into normally restricted areas, hunting or harvesting on private lands (instances), the confiscation of goods, or even negotiations with those considered enemies of the city-states. Guildleves also grant use of aetheryte portals, for quick travel about the region.

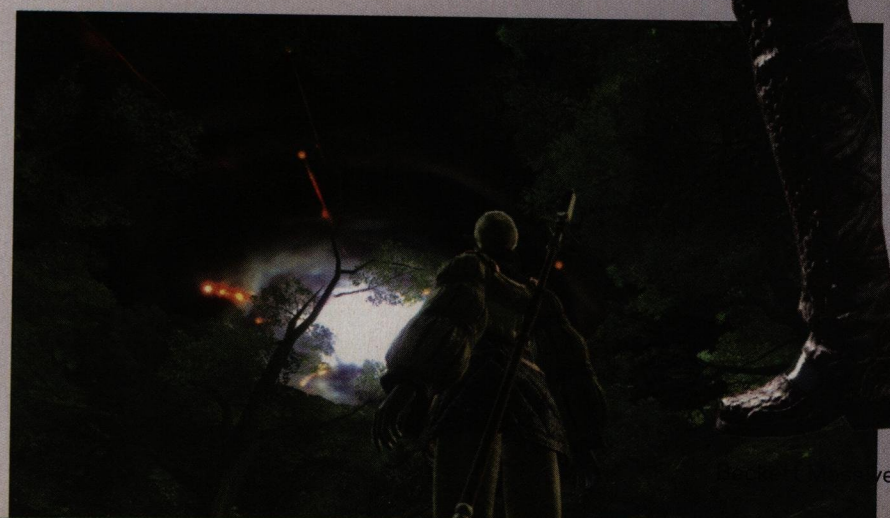
"The guildleve system is the best way to get XP in *Final Fantasy XIV*," said Kurosawa. "The levequest monsters give you many times more XP and skill points than normal monsters."

"You can also select the difficulty before you begin," continued Sundi. "You can do it solo or with a group."

The quests are timed and you can do as many as eight of them in a day. When you return for more, you're asked if you have any completed ones to turn in. Do so. You'll get more XP with the next one you're handed. If you fail one, you can retry it by asking for it again.

Not your run-of-the-mill MMO

Final Fantasy is created for *Final Fantasy* fans and Square Enix stands by that statement. They have made the UI simpler and more intuitive in response to fans' requests. *FFXIV* also supports a gamepad controller and, although the menu system still persists, the rest of the UI does look more familiar to mainstream gamers. The graphics are simply breathtaking for a game that's run on DirectX 9; the signature cutscenes that involve your character, the sweeping music and complex themes, the feeling of déjà vu when you enter each *Final Fantasy* world are all part of its allure. Fans will tell you that the learning curve may be steep, but it's worth the time to learn and familiarize yourself with this beautiful, complex, and challenging game.



BY STEPHEN "SPRAWL" RUSSELL

YOU SHALL NOT PAY

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF LOTRO F2P

"LOTRO TELLS THE STORY IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE JUST SITTING AND WATCHING EVENTS PLAY OUT ALMOST AS ENTERTAINING AS THE GAMEPLAY ITSELF."

The magic and excitement of *The Lord of the Rings Online* is now even easier to access than ever before – and, with a new free-to-play structure in place, even Gollum can't steal away your "preciousss" right to experience the glory and wonder of Turbine's version of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic fantasy world.

I hadn't touched *LOTRO* since the initial closed beta test three years ago. The game has had three long years to mature, and, when the free-to-play announcement was made, I was very excited to venture back into Tolkien's realm to explore all of the changes that have occurred since release. In last month's issue of Beckett *Massive Online Gamer*, we took a look at some of the basics to help you get started in *LOTRO*. This month, I'm going to let you in on my experiences and take you back into Middle-earth to see how the world has changed now that the game is "free" to the masses.

For those of you who are unaware, *LOTRO* was released in 2007 ago using the standard subscription model that is prevalent in the North American market: basically, you paid your $15 a month for access to all of the game's content.

One huge theme at last summer's gaming expos was the hype surrounding the successful deployment of microtransaction and free-to-play gaming models in the U.S. Turbine Entertainment, along with parent company Warner Brothers, had successfully increased revenue with this model for *Dungeons & Dragons Online*, which went free-to-play last year, and now they were going to follow suit their flagship MMO. The unique twist is that Turbine is offering both VIP subscriptions and free-to-play options as means to access Middle-earth. Every developer is watching and waiting to see if an award-winning MMO can handle the change, and some, like Sony aren't waiting, when it comes to *EverQuest II Extended*... who knows, perhaps your favorite online game may do the same one day.

HOBBIT STEPS

It started for me with a 10GB download that took approximately eight hours to download from the official *LOTRO* website at www.lotro.com. I started it before going to sleep one night, and woke up to watch it finish. As with all new games, I had to log in on the Sept. 10 F2P release date. I know, I know, it isn't wise to play on "patch day," but alas, I can never resist. As expected, there were short queues on just about every server throughout release weekend, which eventually peaked to waits of over an hour on Sunday afternoon. Anyone who ever had an active *LOTRO* subscription had had it reactivated, so I was able to just log right in and start playing.

After selecting a server and waiting in the short queue, I was presented with the usual character-selection choices. F2P players only get two character slots, but more can be pur-

chased by clicking on the Turbine Store button located on just about every screen. One thing quickly apparent to any new player is that, in *LOTRO*, you don't have the option of being an "evil race." The race options are man, elf, dwarf, and hobbit, and there are nine class choices, but players can't choose to be an orc or uruk-hai. All of the races are available for F2P players, but the rune-keeper and warden classes require you to spend Turbine Points in the online store.

After watching all the race and class introductory videos, I selected an elven champion (the primary melee DPS class). It's a nice touch to be able to watch a short movie for each class and race choice to help you decide the proper combination that's right for you. The game further extends these cinematics into a Movie Library that players can access at any time in the game. Various cinematic clips will even play on loading screens to keep you entertained while the game is downloading in the background.

My adventure started in Edhelion, an elven sanctuary located within Ered Luin and near Thorin's Hall, north-northeast of the Grey Havens. I found myself caught up in the defense of my home, which was being attacked by an angry army of Dourhand dwarves lead by Skorgrim Dourhand. Dwarves are typically considered good guys in Middle-earth, but Skorgrim has made a dark pact with goblins and trolls, and part of the quest line is to explore the story behind these dark acts. The starter quests in this area all revolve around holding back the dwarves and their evil allies until Elrond can assist. In the end though, our efforts were for naught, and we were forced to abandon the town.

After abandoning the town, the starter quests took me 600 years into the future – elves are immortal, after all – where I was helping Elrond's sons, Elrohir and Elladan, investigate some strange happenings in and around Thorin's Hall. Through these quests, I learned how to play my class, as well as how to perform basic tasks and functions, including rudimentary combat, in the game.

You would think that after 600 years, the Dourhand dwarves would have learned their lesson, but that's not the case. The descendants of Skorgrim, with the help of a vile necromancer, summon the fallen spirit of their long-dead leader. This horrific deed pretty much seals the fate of the Dourhand dwarves as servants of evil.

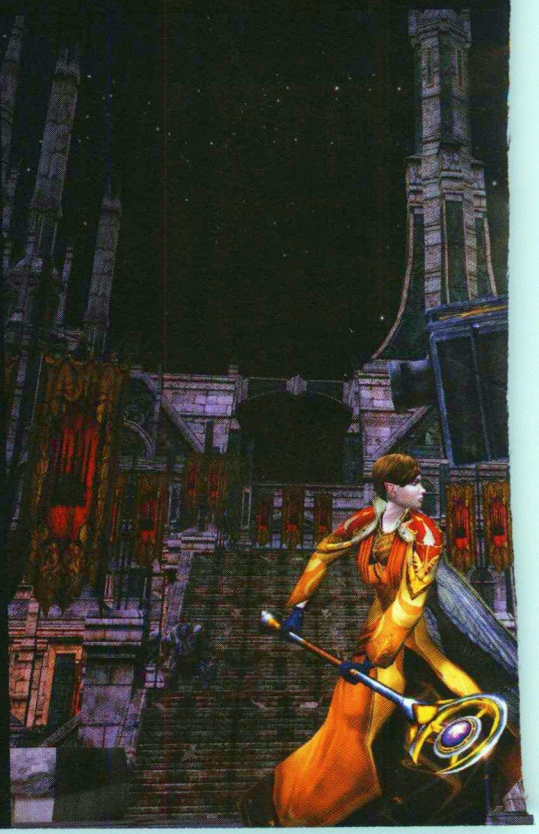
If you've heard this story before, it's really a treat to experience it, and *LOTRO* tells the story in such a way as to make just sitting and watching events play out almost as entertaining as the gameplay itself. In fact, that's one of the huge draws of *LOTRO*; through creative PvE storytelling, and heavy use of dynamic layers, Turbine is able to retell and expand upon Tolkien's writings in a way that delights fans but doesn't infringe upon the original works.

A WORLD APART

In *LOTRO*, you can expect many of the current gaming technologies that are prevalent in other MMOs. For example, as mentioned previously, Turbine has implemented a dynamic layering system to change portions of the game as players progress through major story arcs. One side effect to this feature is that if your friend hasn't progressed as far as you have on a particular quest, you may not be able to meet up with him despite being in the same game world. Turbine has tackled this by allowing the leader of a fellowship (group) to transport his party into his current layer. This small tweak to a popular gaming mechanic really makes a huge difference in a game that revolves around the fellowship. Also, *LOTRO* implements a quest tracker to help players find their destination. However, the quest tracker is a bit different than the ones players of other games might be used to. Turbine does not go so far as to help you with every quest, so you might complete a string of them without really reading the dialogue, but then you will find yourself stuck at some point for taking the easy route. Little tips and hints are often sprinkled within the quest description and you're only doing yourself a disservice by skipping them.

There are the usual array of standard "kill X" and "talk to this guy" quests that we're all accustomed to seeing, but they'll be in short supplies at early levels. Sadly, in my experiences leveling up, I ran into way too many quests that involved killing local wildlife of the wolf and boar variety. After two days of running into these types of quests, I resolved to not pick up another. I was a little worried at first that I may not have had enough quests to level up, but I was wrong. Turbine allows each race to complete quests for any other race's starting area, so I had no problem finding tasks to complete in Bree, which was the first major town that I visited.

While I can't prove it, it really seems like the graphics have come a long way since the initial beta test over three years ago. Numerous times I was forced to stop to "smell the roses" or run



up a hill just to get a good vantage point. The weather effects are also very nicely done, and a smile crossed my face when it first started snowing. Turbine has done an excellent job recreating the landscapes of Middle-earth, and I enjoyed running around one Saturday afternoon just to see the sights. I was a bit disappointed, however, that I was unable to acquire a mount for my explorations, especially considering there are other players at level five riding around. I did have the option of purchasing a temporary 24-hour mount from the store though, but I elected to resist the temptation.

One gripe: Player mounts hard to use without spending money. Either you're a VIP subscriber that has access to everything, or you must purchase the riding skill from the story at level 20.

Once you have the skill, you can then spend in-game gold on a mount. There's currently no way for a free-to-play player to acquire the riding skill other than grinding a lot of deeds for small amounts of Turbine Points. If players have their way, this will be changed in the future. Running around is perfectly acceptable after all, but it's time-consuming and tedious. Thankfully, my hobbit questing partner runs as fast as my elf or we'd be very frustrated, to say the least.

BETTER THAN A BARREL OF DWARVES

I highly recommend trying LOTRO free-to-play. It's free, so why not? You'll be able to play all the way to about the lower 20s, level-wise. At that point, you can either purchase quest packs, complete deeds for small chunks of Turbine Points, or kill monsters all the way to the level cap. Of course, you also have the option of rerolling a new character and playing in a different starting area. The game may be free-to-play, but let's face it, Turbine has to make its money, and if you're enjoying the game past level 20, you probably should pay for the entertainment.

"TURBINE HAS DONE AN EXCELLENT JOB RECREATING THE LANDSCAPES OF MIDDLE-EARTH, AND I ENJOYED RUNNING AROUND ONE SATURDAY AFTERNOON JUST TO SEE THE SIGHTS."

It's inevitable that *LOTRO* will be compared to *World of Warcraft*, so let's point out some of the similarities and differences. If you like WoW's PvE questing mechanics, then *LOTRO* will not disappoint. You pretty much have all the same style of quests, but with the added flair of the familiar Tolkien story lines. Likewise, if you enjoy group dungeon play to acquire items and treasures, then *LOTRO* has these, too. *LOTRO* takes PvE a step further with their "casual player" features. For example, players can collect outfits that can be worn around town for stylish purposes while keeping the stats of the "real" armor they have equipped. Also, a deed system, similar the achievement system prevalent in other games, has been implemented, but again, *LOTRO* takes it a step further by giving you PvE boosts, titles, and rewards for completing even the smallest of deeds. *LOTRO* is clearly targeting the casual PvE player, and has a limited amount of PvP in the form of Monster Play (which is only available to VIP subscribers). In the end, *LOTRO* is not for everyone, but it's available for everyone to try for the price of a free download. Check it out today!

TURBINE POINTS

First and foremost, the store is billed as an optional portion of the game. At a price of $0 to log in, there is a really low barrier of entry into Middle-earth. Even if you only play for a few weeks, you will most assuredly get your money's worth.

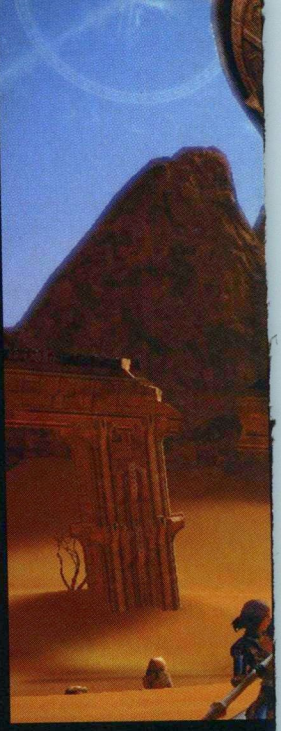
You won't find the best weapons or armor in the Turbine Store, but you will find enhancements that make gameplay a bit easier for those willing to spend a few bucks. For example, if you have a block of uninterrupted time one afternoon and want to spend it playing *LOTRO*, you can purchase a boost from the store for a few dollars that will allow you to earn more experience points or perhaps hit a little harder. You can purchase small stat boosts that help improve your character's performance, too. If *LOTRO* was a heavy PvP game, this would make a lot of players angry, but since this game really focuses on PvE gameplay, this is less of a concern.

So how much is a single Turbine Point worth? In a recent deal in the store, Turbine offered 6,900 points for $50. Do the math, and the exchange rate is roughly 1.38 to 1, or you receive 138 points for every dollar spent. So if you wanted to play a rune-keeper (795 points to unlock), you would need to spend approximately $6 for the privilege. If you're someone that is often tempted by these things, you'll probably be better off paying the $15 per month subscription; however, if you like to very selectively pick and choose, well then this model is a great a la carte option.

BY CAROLYN KOH

OUT OF EXILE

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR MMO DESTINY IN TERA



THE DREAMS OF GODS

In ages past, the elder gods Arun and Shara fled a realm of ceaseless strife and created a new universe for themselves. Laying down to dream, they formed the continents, and their dreams shaped the new world, creating creatures and plants, filling the seas and the skies. Their children became the gods the mortals knew, the gods that shaped them to their whims and fancies.

They also quarreled among themselves, breaking the peace their parents sought, by waging wars that scourged the land and brought ruination across the continents, until the Earth could bear no more and a weary peace took hold. The Age of Gods faded out with less than a sigh and centuries passed until mortals no longer remembered the gods who had died in the wars or disappeared, perhaps hiding to nurse their wounds or hatred.

THE MORTAL AGE

Times have changed. With the gods and their meddling a thing of the past, the races of *TERA* have come together to face a threat from beneath: the Argon invasion of Shara. Old squabbles are shunted aside; bold new leaders take the stage and form the Valkyon Federation. The Age of Mortals begins!

Overnight, a large island emerged from beneath the waves in the sea between Arun and Shara. An expedition was quickly formed to study the island and the ruins that dotted it. Brave warriors and brilliant scholars ventured into the unknown – and were slaughtered. A second expedition is hastily formed, and you're asked to volunteer. You're no coward, but the first expedition was made up of the best and brightest the federation had to offer. What can you offer *TERA*?

HIT ME IF YOU CAN

With six playable races and four roles with two classes each, you have options. *TERA* takes staple MMO roles and makes them exciting again. Think tanking is boring? Try evasion-tanking with a warrior, dancing circles around your foes, your twin swords flashing and a smug grin on your face. Does the prospect of playing a healer strangle your soul? In *TERA*, party support is hardly a passive affair. Healers are in the thick of battles, aiming, dodging, and, yes, even fighting! Skill can trump any formula, and with good reason.

"*TERA* is about choice and players get choices across the board," said Producer Sam Kim. "It's about choices, action, and immersion."

The combat system engages players by requiring them to aim, evade, and carefully time attacks. Tanking is definitely more

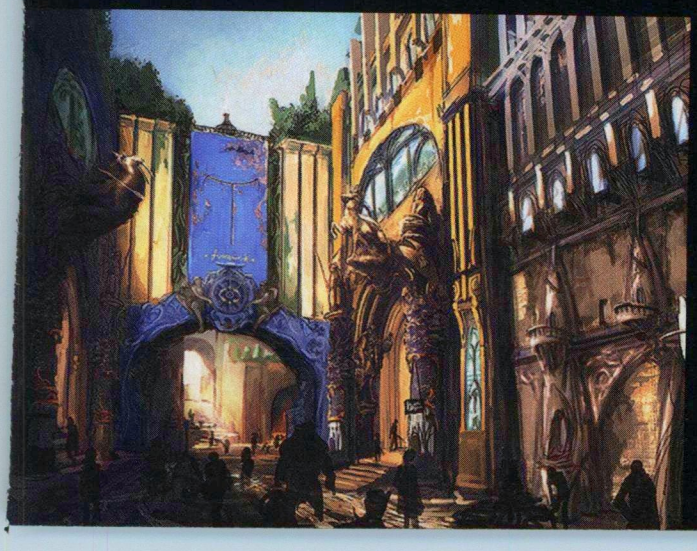
than hitting auto-attack and getting up to make a sandwich. *TERA* keeps the player focused on the center of the screen, where the action is. Melee combatants have to watch where they stick those big pointy things, and ranged classes must aim for where they hope the target's going to be – because there's no such thing as tab-targeting in *TERA*. No one is guaranteed a hit; even healers can miss if their target moves out of the area-of-effect or line-of-sight. Decisions are made on the fly – do you use this slow, but powerful, attack, or do you fire off four quick strikes in rapid succession? Are you kiting the monster out of your group's attack range? Is that why they're screaming with rage (your friends, not the monsters)?

Monsters are canny in *TERA*. They don't just stand there and let you whack them to death. When they see you charging up that big attack, they will get out of the way, and they've got their own tells, too. When a giant tree rears back to smash you into pulp, it's time to block, dodge, or jump out of the way. *TERA* is built to reward skilled players. Gear and mob statistics take a back-seat to well-timed attacks and cunning stratagems. Hunting is fun and addicting and may sidetrack you from questing if you're not careful.

WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO?

Part of what makes *TERA* a unique experience is the number of ways you have control. Whether you're a hardcore or more casual player, you can group with other players or go it alone, you can craft equipment, or you can raid for it; whichever way you go, epic gear is truly epic. Class dynamics are engaging and challenging; a warrior and lancer both tank, but their styles differ greatly. Mystics and priests both heal, but the mystic is proactive, anticipating needed healing, while the priest looks for the characters leaking blood and restores their vitality. Sorcerers and archers play very similarly in some instances, such as PvP combat, and differently in group battles. You customize skills using glyphs, you enchant gear, and in the end, no two tanks, no two casters, no two healers are ever the same.

A message comes in from the northern front on Shara. The Argons are out in force – they must be stopped or all is lost. The Valkyon Federation needs heroes. Will you be the one to turn the tide of battle?

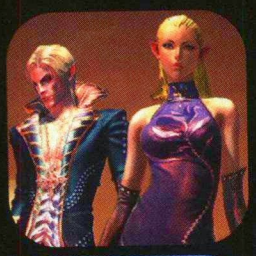


RACES OF TERA

Amani – Descended from dragons and enslaved by giants, the amani combine strength and honor to defend their freedom. Think "Klingons meet samurai."

Baraka – Descended from giants, the baraka are scholars and loremasters who can rock a great axe or a mystic's scepter with equal skill. Don't be fooled by their appearance – these guys could trounce HAL at chess.

Castanics – Fiery and independent, the castanics left the Devan Empire behind to forge their own destiny. Their cunning and guile make them great allies… and shrewd merchants.



High Elves – Often viewed as arrogant and aloof, even their worst critics respect the elves for their wisdom and knowledge – but few forget that they once tried to conquer the world.

Humans – Cursed to wander the world by their god, the hardy humans bring adaptability and diplomacy to the Valkyon Federation. They've seen it all… and survived it.

Popori – The poporis are nature spirits raised by the goddess Elinu to protect the natural world from the ravages of war. Even after her death, the popori continue to carry out their mission… and play a few pranks.

CLASSES OF TERA

Lancer – Not your standard sword-and-board tanks, Lancers face danger head-on and protect their flimsier comrades with their shields and skill.

Warrior – Whirling blurs of steel and grace, warriors protect others by grabbing and holding their foes' attention. Hard to hit and harder to catch, warriors leap fearlessly into battle.

Berserker – Armed with great axes, berserkers can deal colossal amounts of damage with a terrifying degree of precision.

Slayer – The agile slayer cuts down foes like a farmer reaps wheat. Armed with their great swords, slayers are anything but subtle and never boring.

Mystic – Mystics can heal you or drain your life. They make everyone better at their job – and a little uneasy. They're the only class that can summon creatures to aid them in battle.

Priest – Divine warriors who do far more than act as a battlefield bandage dispenser, priests have powerful blessings, deadly spells, and more than a few tricks up their sleeves.

Archer – Swift sharpshooters, darting in and out of battle, archers can inflict tremendous damage on a single enemy – or rain the pain on hordes of foes.

Sorcerer – Masters of arcane power, sorcerers hurl fiery death and frozen anguish. They're fragile but nimble and never afraid to mix it up on the battlefield.

WORLD OF TANKS
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PRO VS. CON

PRO

BY WINTER "WINWIN" MULLENIX

Let's face it: *EverQuest II* is an amazing game, but it's mature for an MMO (as in "old," not "meant for adults"). While the game is chock full of content ranging across many play styles, it's no longer the shiny new car on the block. The market is more competitive than ever these days, with more high-quality, polished F2P games available than ever and gorgeous new subscription-based titles around the corner. To remain relevant, older games have to pull harder than ever. Change begets change, so a blended business model was inevitable.

While many gamers are content with traditional subscription models, there are many others who can't justify the monthly fees. There are tons of awesome F2P games out there, so players are less inclined than ever to financially tether themselves to their games. That's why *EverQuest II Extended* is so brilliant in its implementation – it allows any and everyone to play the game regardless of their views or constraints.

The two business models work very well together. The Live (subscription) servers allow players to maintain their current play style and augment it with fluff items via the Marketplace. The Extended (F2P) servers are separate and allow for customized experiences. "Options" is the key word, since players can choose to buy and unlock races, classes, or items as they see fit. Tiered monthly options with ranges of content are also available to Extended players. Everybody wins with *EQ2X*. Players have more options than ever and *EverQuest II* remains viable in the face of change.

CON

BY KAREN BRYAN

The choice that SOE is offering *EQ2* players isn't between $15 and free – it's between community and revenue. I'm not against free-to-play, and I'm not even against real-money transactions (RMTs). I'm against *EQ2 Extended* because it separates the F2P population from the subscription population.

The problem is that characters on Live servers can be copied to the Extended server, but no characters on the Extended server can transfer to the live ones. The stream of new players to *EQ2* will be diverted to Extended, and the Live population will slowly evaporate.

SOE argues that the players who choose to try *EQ2X* are people who wouldn't have played *EQ2* at all, because of the subscription fee. Live servers wouldn't be affected, since Extended players wouldn't be playing there anyway.

That's not exactly the case. In addition to the new players trying out the game, Extended servers also attract former *EQ2* players who canceled in the past. That's no surprise, since Turbine's *Dungeons & Dragons Online* saw 20% of its player base return to the game after launching its F2P service in 2009.

Of course, *DDO*'s F2P service was part of its live game, while *EQ2*'s remains completely walled off on a separate server. I hope that will change. The guilds and communities of the live servers serve as the ambassadors to the game, and are the reason why players stick around. New players are the lifeblood of established communities. Separating these two groups breaks the symbiotic relationship they have, and in the end, both stand to lose.

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The world will be lost without heroes to save it. And as the stories of old dictated, heroes have come in the time of need to fight for freedom, peace and survival. Begin your journey as the young novice building your way towards being a powerful god-touched warrior of Midgard. Only Heroes can stop the Ragnarok.

Parade Hat

The wearer of the Parade hat is the leader on the way to a fun time! When attacked the Marcher Hat has a moderate chance of casting lvl 5 Angelus. Also when attacked, has a low chance of casting lvl 1 Assumptio. 10% Resist Stun.

If an Acolyte, Priest, High Acolyte, High Priest, or Arch Bishop is wearing the Parade Hat, anytime you cast Heal on a Target there is a 100% chance that Lex Aeterna will be cast on the Target simultaneously.

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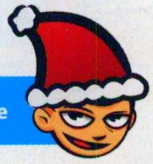
ULTIMATE GAME CARD

White Santa Package

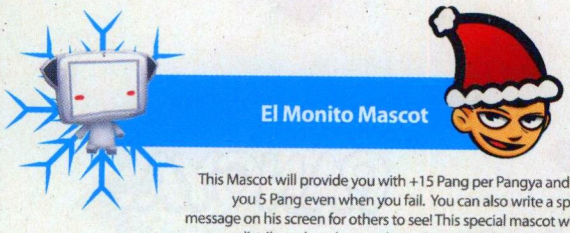


The White Santa Package is a wonderful Christmas package that includes a Santa costume set to instill some holiday cheer! This exclusive item is available only when you redeem the Ultimate Game Card on Dragon Saga during the promotional period.

Dragon Saga is filled with a rich storyline, beautiful lands, challenging boss battles, and comical skill moves. It redefines traditional arcade-style fun for all types of MMO players! Dragon Saga's combat is fast and intense so players need to master the unique attacks, combo chains and advanced skills of their class to stay on top.

Multiple gameplay modes provide countless scenarios for combat and exploration, as players face off against massive bosses, explore mysterious dungeons or engage in PvP and Guild-on-Guild free-for-alls. Cash Shop items and a diverse pet system help players customize their experience, while social elements such as Player Matching make group play easier than ever.

With an anime-inspired art style that brings a unique twist to the world of online golf, players will find themselves deeply immersed in the competitive nature found on Pangya Island. From the excitement of hitting the perfect critical shot, to traversing diverse courses and dealing with mystical hazards such as pirate ships, fire breathing dragons and giant mushrooms, Pangya delivers the perfect balance of content and depth for any beginner or veteran to enjoy. Going head to head in Tournament, Pang Battle, Team Match or Family modes makes it easy to join Pangya and swing away.

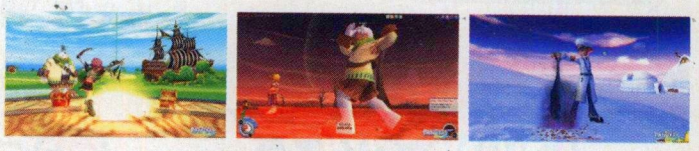


El Monito Mascot

This Mascot will provide you with +15 Pang per Pangya and give you 5 Pang even when you fail. You can also write a special message on his screen for others to see! This special mascot will be distributed to players who recharge at least 10,000 points.

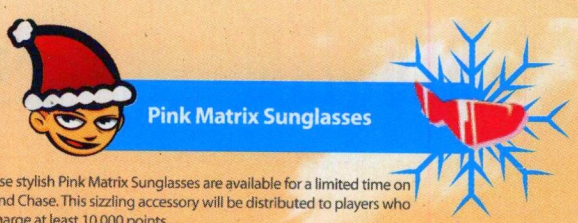
Recharge $10 UGC Card: El Monito (7 Days)
Recharge $20 UGC Card: El Monito (15 Days)

*Item is only obtainable by using the Ultimate Game Card.



Showcasing a genre breaking game design, Grand Chase delivers an in-depth experience packed with intense finger blistering action that any true action brawl RPG fan will appreciate. Set in a world endangered by Kaze'aze attempting to usurp the medieval throne, players embark upon a mission to defeat this evil force. Offering a wide range of classes and brave young knights to choose from, there is definitely a game play style for everyone.

Offering a vast selection of dungeon crawling skills and acquirable talents and gear, players can also go head-to-head in PVP battles for bragging rights. Grand Chase has the perfect blend of side scrolling RPG elements, intense PVP, a seamlessly enhanced UI and stunning graphics providing plenty of reasons to sign up.



Pink Matrix Sunglasses

These stylish Pink Matrix Sunglasses are available for a limited time on Grand Chase. This sizzling accessory will be distributed to players who recharge at least 10,000 points.

Recharge $10 UGC Card: Pink Matrix Sunglasses (7 Days)
Recharge $20 UGC Card: Pink Matrix Sunglasses (14 Days)

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BY JASON WINTER

PLANETS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

That galaxy far, far away? It's pretty big, as you'd expect from most galaxies. And it's filled with loads of planets where you can find everything from slobbering, bloodthirsty aliens to beautiful Twi'lek dancing girls. We're sure you can figure out which ones we prefer.

As of press time, 16 planets had been announced for *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, and the game is still a long ways from release. If they're analogous to MMO "zones," consider this: *World of Warcraft* had about 40 zones at launch, which could mean that we've seen fewer than half of the real estate *The Old Republic* has to offer, though we're guessing the final count will actually be somewhere around 30. Here's a quick, one-liner describing each currently known planet:

Alderaan: A planet torn apart by a civil war – in other words, the perfect PvP playground.

Balmorra: Home to a cutting-edge manufacturing plant, the Jedi and Sith wage an ongoing war to control the planet's vitally important weapons and droid factories.

Belsavis: Home of "The Tomb," a prison operated by the Republic where the most heinous criminals in the galaxy are interred.

Corellia: One of the charter members of the Republic, recent rumors of Imperial infiltration have muddled the waters.

Coruscant: The seat of government for the Republic, still recovering from a devastating Sith attack.

Hoth: Thousands of years before Luke took down an AT-AT, enterprising explorers can find the remnants of a great space battle littered across its frozen surface.

Hutta: The Hutts foreclosed on this planet when their original home planet was abandoned – and you thought we bilked the Native Americans to get Manhattan!

Dromund Kaas: Sith HQ, home to the new Empire and a place where ambitious Imperial officers can forge their destiny through intrigue and political maneuvering.

Ilum: Hidden beneath snow and ice are crystals ideal for the construction of lightsabers, making the once-valueless planet a volatile hotspot.

Korriban: Ancestral homeworld of the Sith and home to the infamous Sith Academy.

Nar Shaddaa: A glittering jewel of a planet, but beneath the opulence lies a seamy underworld that calls the shots.

Ord Mantell: A planet torn apart by a civil war – hey, wait, haven't we been here already?

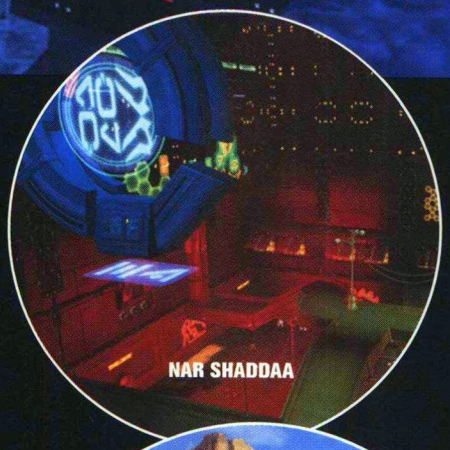
Taris: Still recovering from an apocalyptic Sith attack 300 years ago, scavenger gangs won't be the least concern for unwary travelers.

Tatooine: A lush, jungle planet, with thousand-mile-long rivers and deep oceans… just kidding. It's a lawless, dusty rock with some interesting ex-Czerka-Corp. tech left behind.

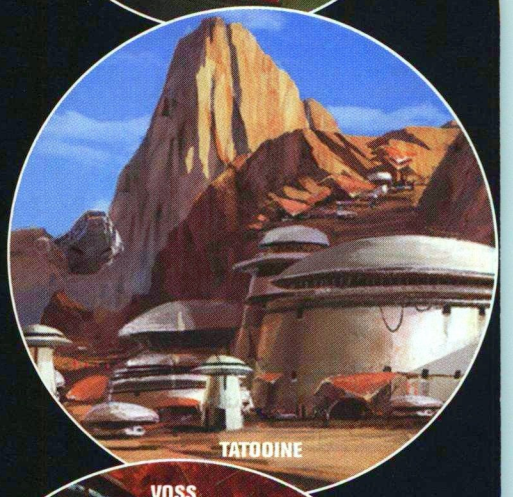
Tython: "Birthplace" of the Force and current home of the Jedi following the sacking of their temple on Coruscant.

Voss: Also the name of a canny race of Force users who wage war against the stronger Gormak, who believe them to be an abomination worthy only of eradication.

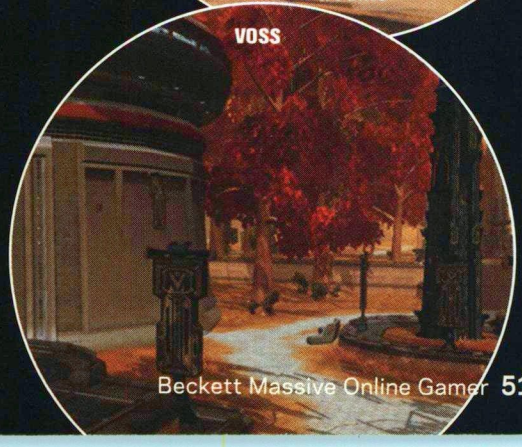
ILUM



NAR SHADDAA



TATOOINE



VOSS

BY SHEILA LEWIS

CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS

LOCK AND LOAD WITH THE HOLIDAY SEASON'S HOTTEST NEW FPS RELEASE

DUTY CALLS

CoD: Modern Warfare 2 shattered opening-day sales records with approximately $310 million in sales in North America and the UK alone.

CoD: Modern Warfare 2 set an all-time entertainment industry record for grossing an estimated $550 million worldwide in its first five days.

In January 2010, *CoD: Modern Warfare 2* surpassed $1 Billion in worldwide retail sales.

In June 2010, life-to-date map packs for the *Call of Duty* franchise surpassed 20 million units, helping to secure the title's position as #1 best-selling first-person shooter franchise in the U.S. and Europe.

This year, Activision delivered over $180,000 worth of *Modern Warfare 2* games to the U.S. Navy.

Target: Acquired. Mission: Purchase. Operation time: November 9, 2010. Move out!

Call of Duty has returned to all major platforms this fall with a brand new installment in the ultra-popular first-person shooter franchise. *Call of Duty: Black Ops* takes you across the globe as a member of an elite Black Ops force kicking ass (and rarely taking names) in the Cold War. Black Ops features an epic single-player campaign, in which players engage in covert warfare and classified operations, co-op gameplay, and a jam-packed multiplayer experience. Here are some of the highlights:

BLACK OPS INTEL

Black Ops gives you the tools to personalize your soldier to an extent that's not typically seen in shooters, introducing player customization options never before seen in a *Call of Duty* game. CoD Points allow you to create your soldier from head to toe. Customization features include a huge selection of face paints, camo, a ton of emblem backgrounds and images, and over 40 different reticles with your choice of reticle and lens colors. You can choose to look menacing, goofy, or friendly – it's totally up to you.

TRAINING GROUNDS

One of the many new modes in *CoD: Black Ops* is Combat Training mode. It's here that you hone your skills in free-for-all or Team Deathmatch on any multiplayer map against practice dummies. Not only can you beat up on dummies, you can also choose whether you want to train alone or online with other players. Familiarize yourself with weapons and maps and devise your own strategies before heading up to the big leagues. If you're a newcomer to the *Call of Duty* series then you'll definitely want to jump right in and give Combat Training mode a whirl!

WAGER MATCHES

If you thought you'd have to head to Vegas to get in a little gambling, then think again. Wager Match types let you bet that you'll be among the top three players at the end of a match. If you succeed, you win CoD Points. If you fail, then you lose currency to the top players. Ouch. It's a big gamble, but a fun one if you've got the stones for it!

One example of a wager match is "Sticks and Stones." Armed with a crossbow, ballistic knife, and a tomahawk, you earn points for every kill you score – and if you're hit by a tomahawk, your match points are reset to zero! If you're one of the top three players with the most points at the end, then the payola is yours. If you think you're good enough, then it's worth some run-throughs, since CoD Points are needed to unlock many of the goodies in *Black Ops*.

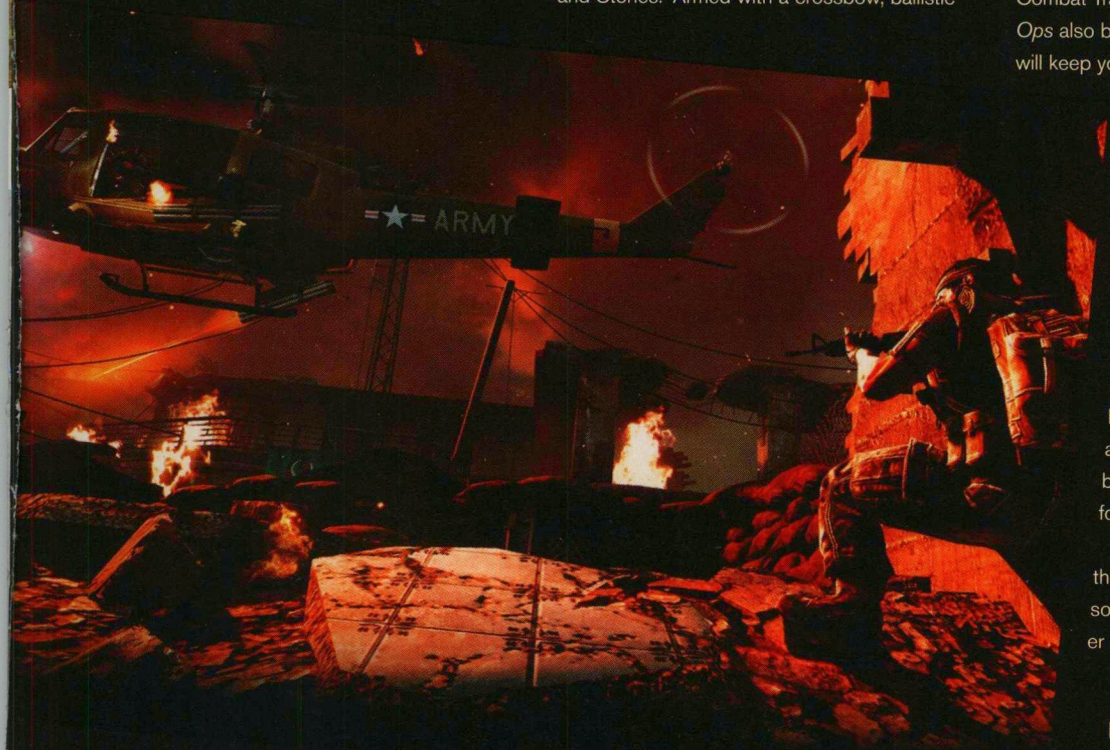
BRAAAAINS!

That's right, kids, zombies are back and they mean business! Fans of the Call of Duty series asked for zombies, and zombies they have received. In *Black Ops* (or "*Dead Ops,*" as the zombie campaign has been nicknamed) you can wage war against the undead in four-player cooperative mode.

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

As cool as zombies, wager matches, and Combat Training modes are, *Call of Duty: Black Ops* also boasts a lot of other really fun stuff that will keep you heading back in for more. The new "Theater Mode" helps you show off your epic kills, with an edit-and-upload gameplay videos feature. New "Killstreaks" have been added, such as the Napalm Strike, which utilizes a remote-controlled RC car and helicopters to send in your weapons of mass destruction. *Black Ops* also has "Contracts" which work similar to RPG quests. Purchase a quest with CoD Points, and when you complete it, you earn back your CP, along with a big bonus for a job well done.

Call of Duty: Black Ops is not just the hottest shooter of the holiday season – it's a serious contender for shooter of the year. Fire away!

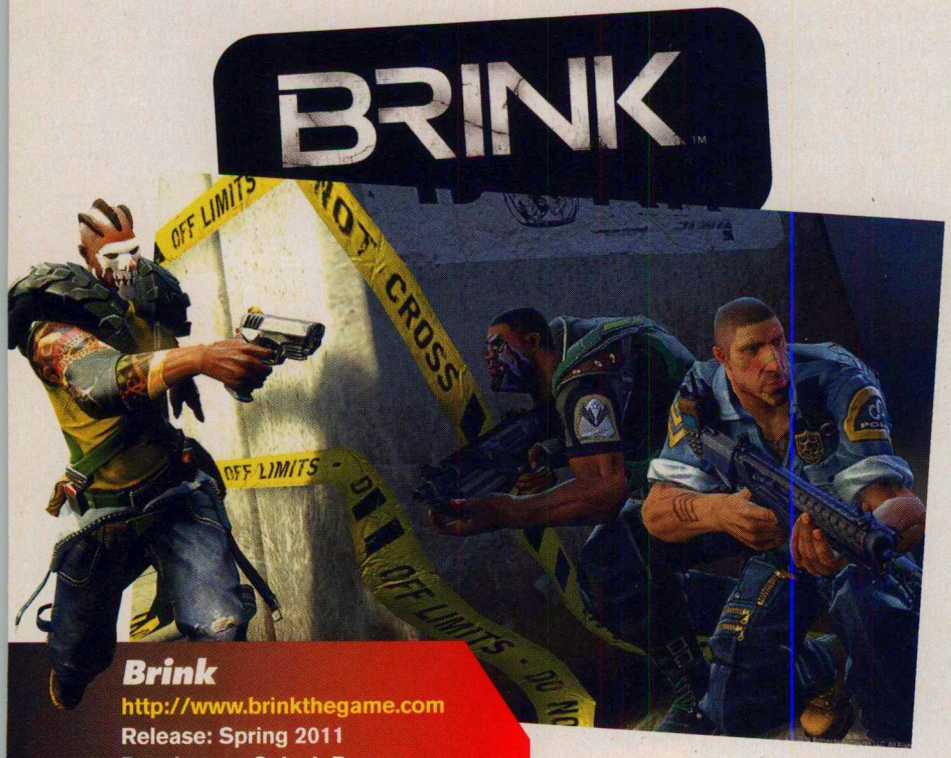


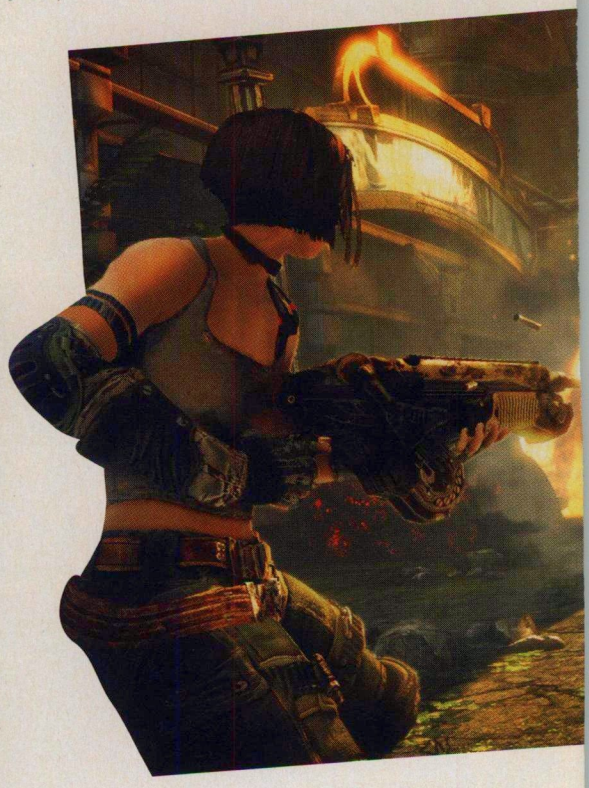
BY SHEILA LEWIS

PREPARE F

2011's early releases will blow you away

Some of the most highly anticipated multiplayer action games of all time are due out in the first quarter of 2011, making it an especially exciting time for fans of shooters. The following games not only offer up plenty of explosive gameplay, but they actually have some really exciting storylines to go with the bullets and explosions! Take a look at five games that should be on every action player's "must-have" list for 2011.





Brink

http://www.brinkthegame.com
Release: Spring 2011
Developers: Splash Damage

Although *Brink* was expected to release in 2010, fans of the upcoming FPS are willing to wait until Spring 2011 to get their hands dirty with this unique title that blends single-player, co-op, and multiplayer gameplay into one seamless experience.

Brink takes place on a massive Ark which was built as part of a "green vision" model for sustainable living. Scientists worked and lived on the man-made floating city to make their vision a reality. Then a global environmental crisis hit: glaciers melted, sea levels rose, and thousands from around the world fled to the Ark in order to survive. As the Ark lost contact with what remains of the mainland, and resources dwindled, social factions formed, and Security and Resistance forces began to fight for control of the Ark. Pick a side and fight for your survival!

Brink features tons of customization options for your character, goals and rewards, dynamic battlefields, and an innovative control system. In Brink you can choose to play campaigns solo, cooperatively, or competitively with up to 16 players or AI characters.

Portal 2

http://www.thinkwithportals.com/
Release: February 9, 2011
Developers: Valve

Portal 2 is the much-anticipated sequel to Valve's 2007 *Portal*, a game which won a whopping 70 industry achievement awards. At the end of the first game, GLaDOS (Genetic Lifeform and Disk Operating System), the sentient computer system managing the Aperture Labs, had seemingly been destroyed. In Portal 2, players return as Chell, the protagonist from the first Portal. Waking from stasis after hundreds of years, Chell finds herself in the Aperture Science Facility, which has fallen into disrepair. Players will come into

OR ACTION

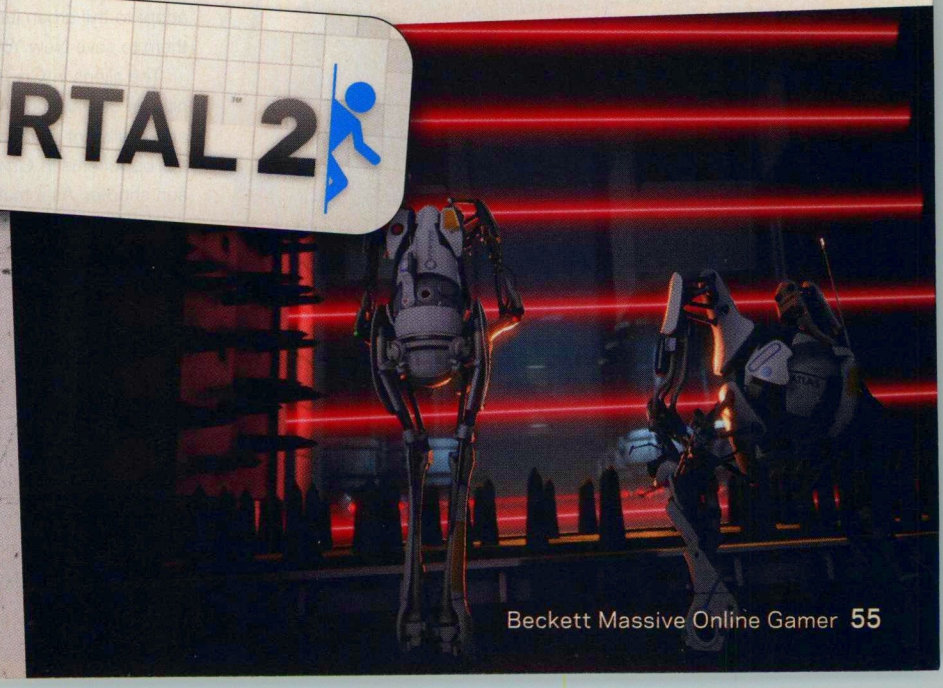
BULLETSTORM

Bulletstorm
http://www.bulletstorm.com/
Release: February 22, 2011
Developers: Epic Games/People Can Fly

Bulletstorm tells the story of a futuristic utopia protected by an elite band of mercenaries called Dead Echo. When Dead Echo members Grayson Hunt and Ishi Sato learn they've been working for the wrong side, they're betrayed by their commander and exiled to the abandoned planet of Stygia. In *Bulletstorm*, Grayson and Ishi find themselves surrounded by hordes of mutants and flesh-eating gangs in an abandoned paradise. They have two objectives: get off the planet alive and exact revenge on the man who sent them there.

Players step into the role of Grayson Hunt, who boasts an arsenal of over-the-top combat moves and outrageously large guns. Bulletstorm's array of distinct "skillshots" are a major selling point for this game. The skillshot system rewards players for inciting mayhem in the most creative way possible; the more insane the skillshot, the more points players collect to upgrade their character and unlock weapons, which then allows them to execute even more creative moves and exaggerated skillshots.

PORTAL 2



contact with many personality cores throughout the game, including Wheatley, the core which wakes Chell from stasis and becomes the player's guide.

As Chell and Wheatley make their way through the facility, GLaDOS is inadvertently woken and accuses Chell of "murdering" her years earlier. To sum things up, GLaDOS is a cranky old cow which tries to interfere with all efforts to rebuild the dilapidated facility. As a result, the player is put through numerous puzzle-based challenges in single-player mode, or cooperatively. In co-op mode, players take on the roles of robots and must work together to complete each level, despite GLaDOS' attempts to get in the way.

Dead Space 2

http://deadspace.ea.com/
Release: January 25, 2011
Developers: Visceral Games

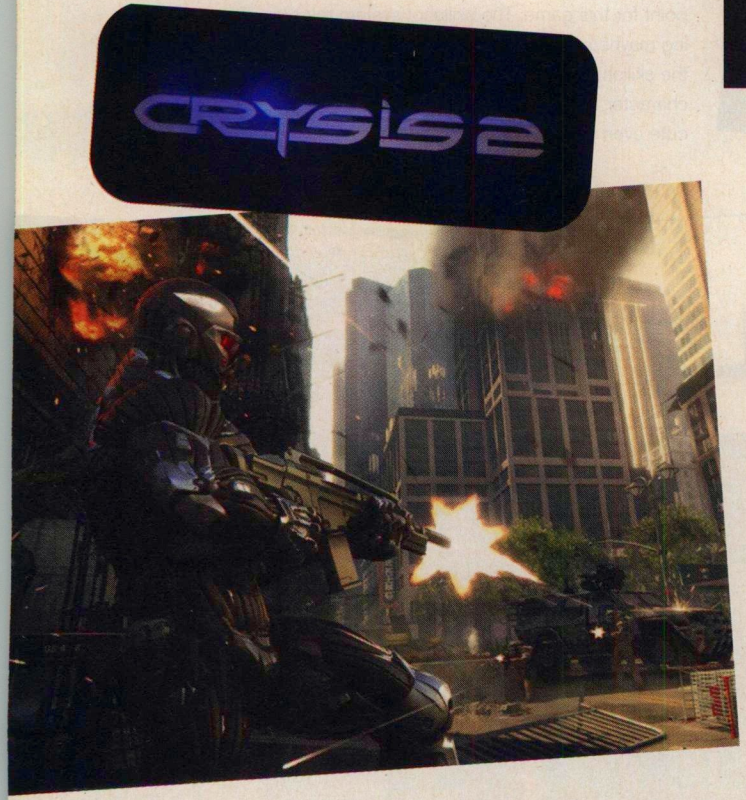
It was big news when Visceral Games announced that the award-winning action-horror title *Dead Space* would receive a sequel. Originally launched in 2008, *Dead Space* won close to 100 industry awards and became an instant hit with horror and video game fans worldwide. Now that the release grows closer, the anticipation for *Dead Space 2* is reaching a frenzied peak! An infection continues to spread throughout space and Isaac Clarke is the only person able to contain it. Lots of baddies still need killing and there's only one man that can do it!

In *Dead Space 2*, Isaac Clarke returns to fight the Necromorphs, and he's packing his signature plasma cutter and a whole new arsenal of slicing-and-dicing goodness. Isaac will meet new characters, explore zero gravity environments, and fight for survival against a relentless Necromorph onslaught. Visceral Games promises an experience that gamers will never forget, including plot twists that will surprise you and a huge cast of twisted, disgusting monsters that will scare the daylights out of you.

Sounds like a game with single-player written all over it; so how does multiplayer work? *Dead Space 2* multiplayer is objective-based, 4v4 gameplay set on a space station called "Sprawl," where the Sprawl Security Team takes on the alien Necromorphs – yep, that's right, you get to play as one of the game's hideous creatures. Security must restore safety in the Sprawl, while the Necromorphs have to make sure that Security fails in its objectives.

Crysis 2

http://www.ea.com/games/crysis-2
Release: March 22, 2011
Developers: Crytek

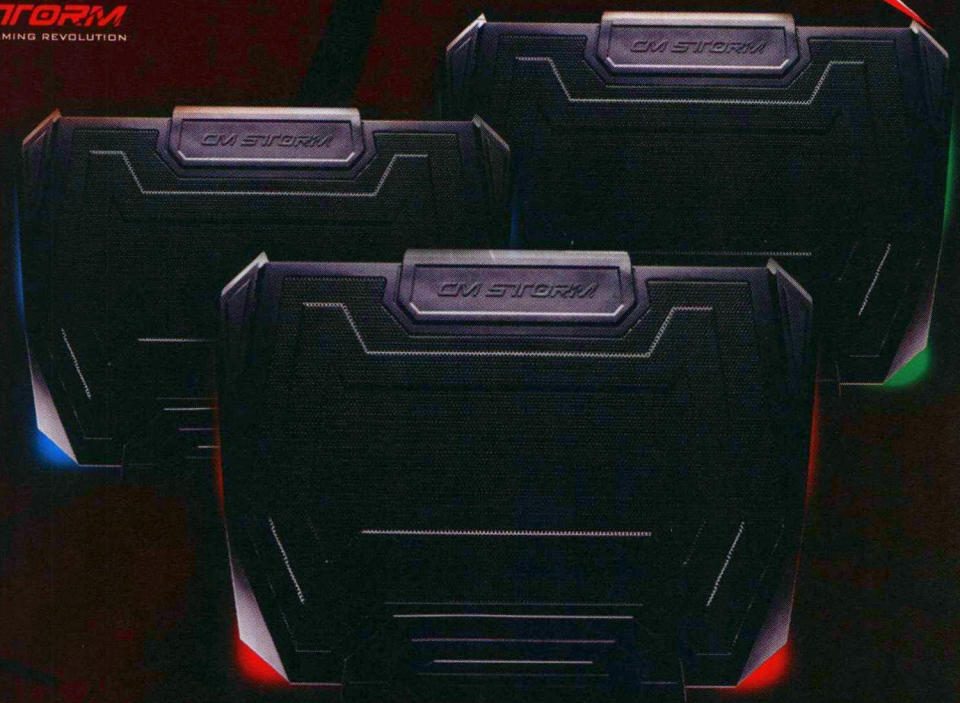


Another action game with another interesting story, Crytek's *Crysis 2* heads to New York, where the city is under attack by a hostile alien species. Surrounded by devastation, players must assess the situations they encounter, adapt to the urban jungle and use the amazing weapons and powers given to them to save New York.

The aliens in *Crysis 2* don't just want to move in – they're bent on total annihilation of mankind. With their deadly weaponry, exceptional sensory abilities, and intelligent collaboration, the aliens have the upper hand. Crytek claims that the opponents in *Crysis 2* will be the most challenging ever seen in a first-person shooter. As if that's not enough to deal with, a nightmare plague hits the city and spreads with brutal epidemic speed. It's pure chaos. The military can't contain the threat, and those that choose to remain and fight are dead men walking. Winning this encounter will require technology beyond anything any modern soldier has ever seen. You alone must wield the combat technology of Nanosuit 2, and make the last stand to save humanity from destruction.

Several multiplayer modes will be featured in *Crysis 2*, such as Crash Site and Team Instant Action. In Crash Site, teams of players will compete for control of Ceph Drop Pods launched periodically into the map by dropships patrolling overhead. Teams score points by guarding the pods and keeping enemies at bay. Team Instant Action is a standard game mode pitting two teams against each other. Kill as many opponents as possible, while attempting to minimize your own deaths. Use the Nanosuit to sneak up on enemies in stealth mode, or charge in and gun them down in armor.

CM STORM
ARMING THE GAMING REVOLUTION



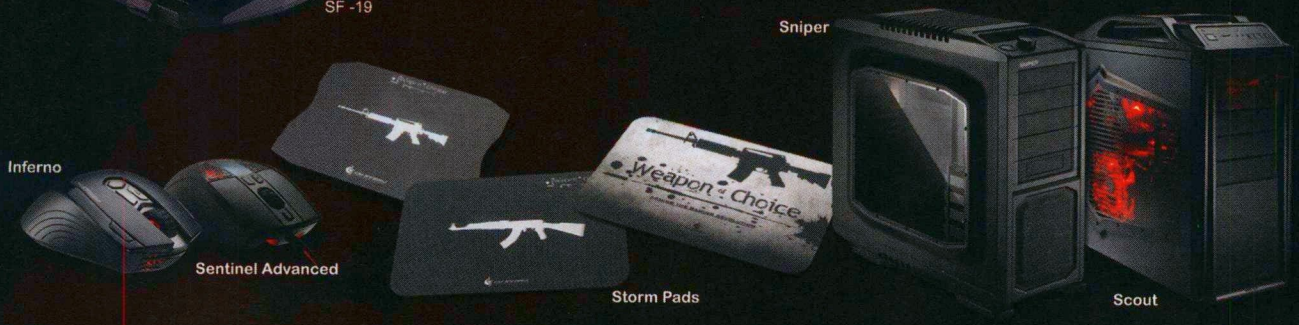
SF-19

STRIKE FORCE USB 3.0

In order to protect a gamer's gear while it's under heavy stress from game play, the SF-19 employs its incredible ability to dissipate all of that excess heat through its surface. It also has a strengthened mesh that can withstand all notebook sizes up to 19". It also features 2 x 140mm adjustable turbine fans that are specially engineered to provide unprecedented airflow that keeps notebook components running at optimal temperatures.

Designed with future compatibility in mind, the SF-19 is equipped with 4 advanced USB 3.0 ports which make it future proof for all devices such as high speed hard drives, high performance gaming mice, headsets, and peripherals that require high speed transfer rates.

The SF-19 has a Multi-Light Shader™ that helps create an environment for any gaming intensity by providing 7 colored light profiles. It's geared to cool all high-end notebooks on the market today.



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BY SHEILA LEWIS

ACTION-PACKED FR

Originally shackled to the MMO space, the free-to-play model is now breaking out in all directions. First-person shooters using F2P models are becoming increasingly popular, with strategy games, and even sports games, not far behind. Here are five fun and innovative free games (with and without microtransactions) that deserve your attention.

Alien Swarm

http://store.steampowered.com/app/630/
Developer: Valve
Release Date: July 19, 2010

Once upon a time, Valve hired two talented members of the *Half-Life* mod community and tasked them with working on the popular *Left 4 Dead* franchise. Somehow the two-some managed to find the time to work on their *Half-Life* co-op mod on the side; and Valve decided to be generous and release its labor of love for free. Thus, *Alien Swarm* was born.

The completely free tactical multiplayer action game sets players on an epic bug hunt. In *Alien Swarm*, players can select from four distinct IAF Marine classes and eight unique characters. Plan your attack using an unlockable arsenal of 40 weapons, with countless loadout configurations, against a wide variety of aliens. Blaze your way through an over-run, off-world colony, eradicating the alien infestation in environments ranging from the icy planet's surface to a subterranean lava-flooded mining facility. It's a true bug-frying frenzy!

The game also comes with the complete game code and mod tools. Multiplayer matchmaking is done through Valve's Steam service and includes game stats and 64 unlockable achievements. *Alien Swarm* has received a ton of praise in the action gaming community. At any given time, you can find a couple of thousand players online. It may not be a "massive" title, but you sure can't beat that price!

FREEBIES

Cheap thrills abound, if you know where to look

League of Legends

http://www.leagueoflegends.com
Developer: Riot Games
Release: October 22, 2009

League of Legends is a free-to-play, multiplayer, strategic role-playing game that was inspired by a popular map for *Warcraft* 3, called Defense of the Ancients. *League of Legends*, known as "*LoL*" to its over two million fans, is an addictive game that tosses players into multiplayer battle arenas to slug it out in team-based competition – but there's a catch! You're not the one who's actually fighting; instead, it's the job of your chosen "Champion" to get you through a match. *LoL* is updated with new Champions on a regular basis, and extra goodies are available through micro-transactions.

LoL isn't a passive game, though, and it's not only your Champion that has something to say about how the match goes down. After creating your "Summoner," you take control of a Champion, chosen from an extra-large pool of contenders. As you battle it out, your Champion will gain levels, you'll collect runes, and mastery trees will be available to help you upgrade your Champion and your own character. Players have important strategic decisions to make, such as how best to develop your Champion and which spells to bring into battle. *LoL* uses multiplayer match-making, so the game will attempt to find you a match based on skill level, or you can choose to play with friends from your buddy list. Teams work together to destroy the other team's Nexus. To destroy a Nexus, each team must make its way down a lane, destroying the opposing team's Champions and gaining levels along the way. Champions can be improved using in-game gold to purchase items, and Champion abilities are leveled up as the game is played.

LoL can be played in tutorial, practice, normal, and ranked modes. In normal mode, the server creates groups and then a session-based round begins, matching skills as closely as possible. Ranked mode games are available for players level 20 and higher, and are played tournament-style. The rules are stricter than they are in normal mode, and players are ranked based on their in-game performance. Ranked games are played over the course of seasons, and at the end of a season the top teams on the ladder have a chance to compete in prized finals. The only real downside to *LoL* is that it can seem overwhelming to newcomers. Fortunately there are solo modes to practice in before bringing your Champion out to face the world.

Minecraft

http://www.minecraft.net/
Developer: Markus Persson
Released: June 28, 2010

Minecraft is a little indie game developed by Markus Persson that's all the rage right now. It's a virtual world with endless possibilities; it's a bit like LEGO and just as addictive.

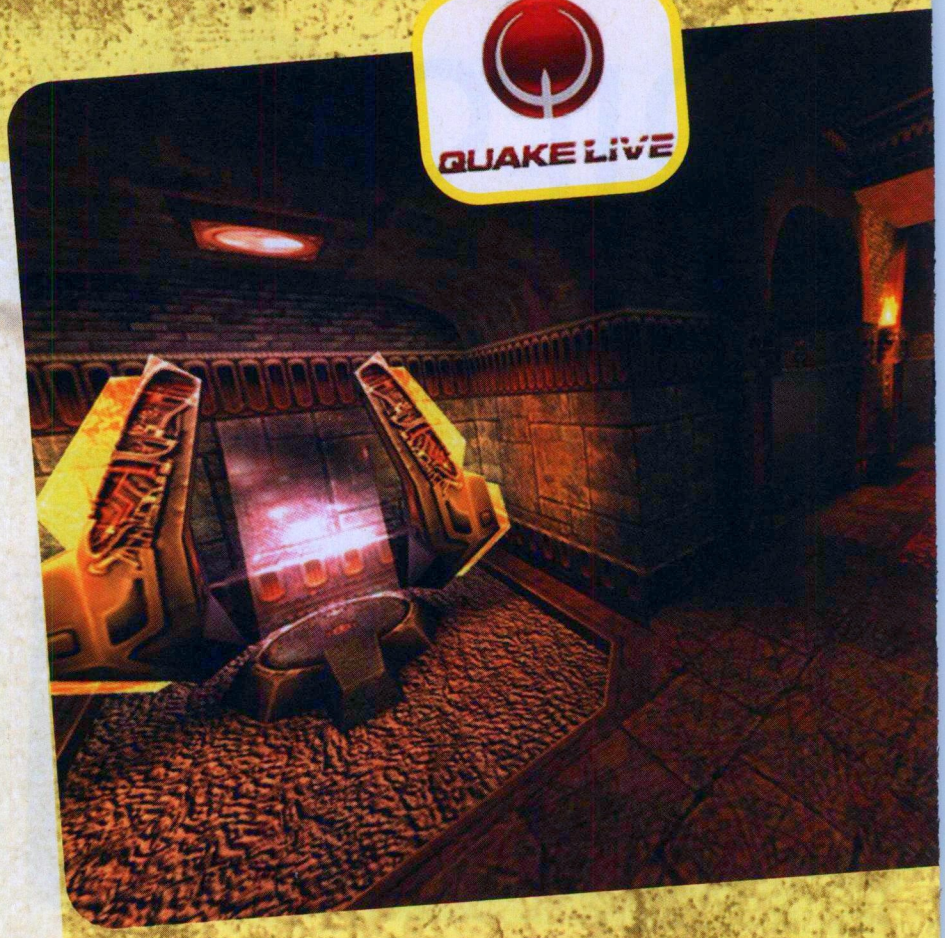
The simple sandbox construction title has been in development since early 2009 but recently has caught the attention of big development studios and gamers alike. *Minecraft* is a free single-player and multiplayer game and also has a premium paid version available for download.

If you're looking for cutting-edge graphics then you may as well look elsewhere, because *Minecraft* is a 3-D world that looks like it just jumped out of the last decade. The game is played by creating and destroying blocks on a map to construct a world. There are different types of blocks at your disposal, all of which will aid you in creating a virtual space with buildings, roads, and even art. *Minecraft* also features harvesting and crafting, so players can create their own tools and blocks.

In the Classic mode of the game you can build to your heart's content in an ever-changing world that features both single and multiplayer gameplay; but if you need a little more zing, then Survival mode introduces monsters and other features.

Quake Live

http://www.quakelive.com/
Developer: id Software
Release Date: August 6, 2010



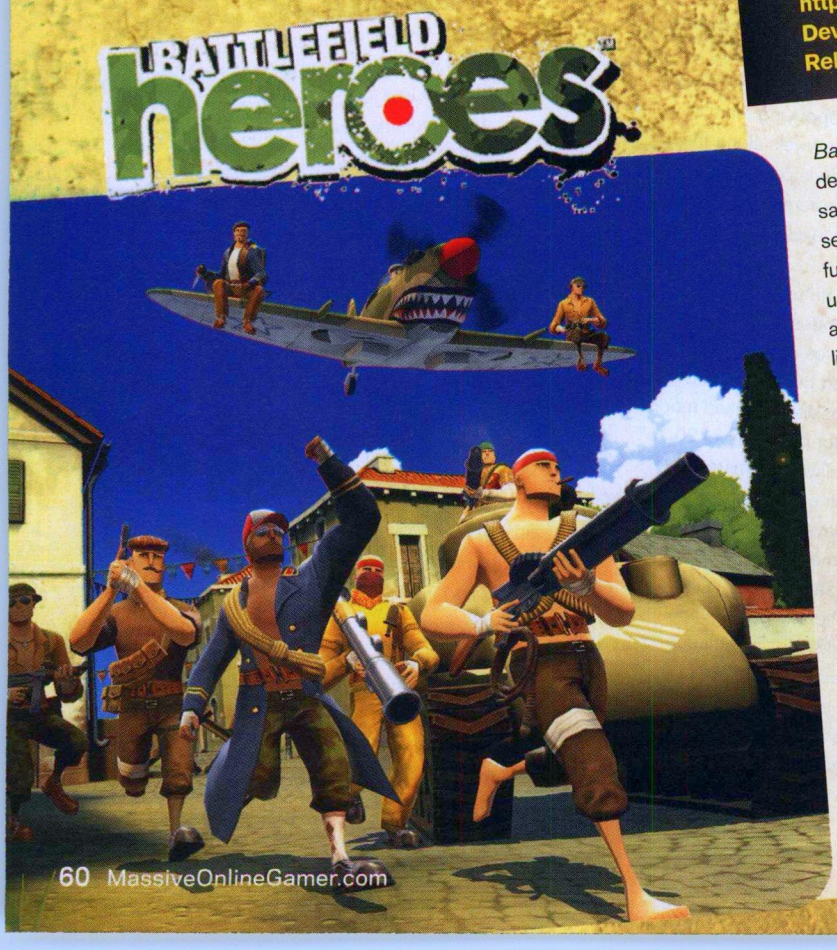
Based on id Software's *Quake III* Arena, *Quake Live* is a browser-based multiplayer shooter that's free to download and play. Although *Quake Live* is free, the game recently came out of beta status and introduced Pro Subscriptions, which add greater features, more game modes, and exclusive maps to the lineup. The free version of *Quake Live* is suitable for players who don't want to compete at a professional level. Everything is done from a single website, from downloading, updating, and playing the game, to viewing match stats and a little social networking.

Quake Live offers a number of game types, such as free-for-all deathmatch, 1v1 duel, team deathmatch, clan arena, capture the flag, and freeze tag. Work your way through a large variety of maps, collecting health, armor, weapons and ammo, while picking off your opponents (or being picked off) ad infinitum. For each kill (frag) or completed objective, you score points and are ranked accordingly. If you've played *Quake* in the past, then you'll enjoy the huge selection of classic maps at your disposal.

Newbies be warned: *Quake* is the shooter of champions. Be prepared to take a real beating if you're not familiar with first-person shooters! At the same time, remember that practice makes perfect.

Battlefield Heroes

http://www.battlefieldheroes.com/
Developer: DICE
Released: June 25, 2009



Battlefield Heroes was created by the same crew well-known for designing the award-winning *Battlefield* franchise. You won't find the same type of hardcore military action in *Battlefield Heroes* as you'll see in other *Battlefield* games, but you'll certainly find yourself some fun and unique matches for the low, low price of free. *Heroes* offers up slightly less serious game play than your average shooter, and it also boasts cartoon-like characters and environments to keep things light.

Heroes is a class-based game which allows players to become a gunner, soldier, or commando, and to fight for one of two factions: the National Army and the Royal Army. Each class has its own special abilities, and both have access to vehicles. As you can probably imagine, vehicles are quite popular in the game, and you can even cram in some passengers.

As you earn experience points in *Heroes*, you level up your character, and with each level comes the option to purchase new abilities. Valor points are earned doing missions and can be used to purchase health and other consumables, right up to a new weapon. Of course, as with most free-to-play games these days, microtransactions are also available.

The game features a built-in matchmaking system to ensure that players of equal skill are paired together for fair play. *Battlefield Heroes* is worth a look for its vibrant graphics alone – but, fortunately you also get to drive around like a maniac and shoot things.

CREATIVE

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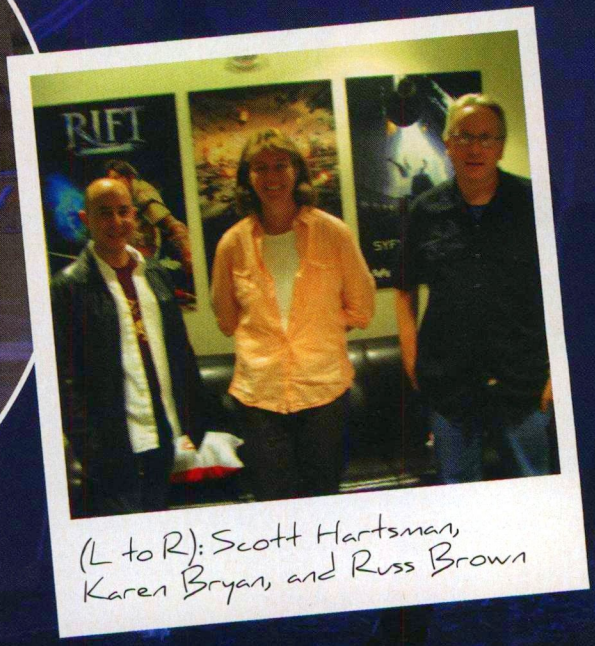
BY KAREN BRYAN

INTO THE RIFT

OUR CORRESPONDENT CONTEST WINNER'S TRIP TO TRION WORLDS



(L to R): Scott Hartsman, Karen Bryan, and Russ Brown

F"IT'S ALL ABOUT SECOND CHANCES"

That's how Lore Lead Writer Nick McDowell described the warring factions of Trion Worlds' upcoming *Rift: Planes of Telara*. On one side are the Guardians – hand-picked by the gods to defend Telara from planar invasions and repair the tear in the protective ward that was opened by their ancestors. On the other side are the Defiant – cast out by the gods, they nonetheless want to save their planet from the invasions, and have decided to take action on their own through the use of technology. They have foreknowledge of the fate of Telara, and feel that they, not the gods, can prevent impending doom. The two sides have a common goal, but are polar opposites: The Guardians seek redemption from the sins of their past by atoning for their ancestors, while the Defiant focus on the future and changing their fate.

"Second chances" also fits the *Rift* team at Trion. Headed by Chief Creative Officer and Executive Producer Scott Hartsman and Vice President of Development Russ Brown, the team has collectively worked on 14 major MMO titles over the years. They are battle-tested, passionate, and eager to take the lessons of the past and apply them to *Rift*. In an industry that has recently seen a number of AAA MMOs stumble, the *Rift* team is focused on avoiding those pitfalls.

I had the good fortune of visiting the Trion studios for a day, to meet the team and try out *Rift: Planes of Telara*. As a long-time gamer, it was a real eye-opener to get to pull back the curtain and pick the brains of those who make the games, and create the worlds, in which I play.

BEGINNER QUESTING

Upon my arrival, I met Assistant Brand Manager Jordan Rosenbaum, Community Manager Cindy Bowens, and Senior Brand Manager Greg Bauman. After a quick coffee, I got right into solo play. Jordan showed me around the starting area of Freemarch, where I rolled up a Defiant, a kelari reaver. The kelari are a race of elves who, long ago, broke away from the high elves and formed a culture based on bargaining with the spiritual world in their quest for magical technology. My class, the reaver, is a tank with decent survivability and some very nice damage output. I've seen several write-ups marvel at how polished and visually stunning the game is, but that didn't prepare me for what I saw. Telara is full of amazing vistas and eye-catching scenery. The lighting accentuates details and really sets the mood for the environment, particularly under water, where it was a pleasant surprise to be able to swim without the fuzzy blur effect players are accustomed to.

What immediately struck me about *Rift* was the attention to detail, little features that long-time gamers will recognize and appreciate. For example, my natural curiosity (and distaste for solo questing) caused me to wander off, and I was pleasantly surprised to see a message for discovery experience, something that is bound to satisfy players who believe the journey is as important as the destination.

As I roamed around, I also noticed collectibles ("shinies" for the *EQ2* crowd). These are random (and often amusing) items you can collect around the world that give experience and, sometimes, rewards for completing the collection. At one point, I killed a bunny and Jordan let me know that sometimes they drop collectible bunny tears. From that point on, I couldn't pass by a bunny, squirrel, or other cute fuzzy creature without laying waste to it.

But as much as I normally avoid questing, I began to dive into it. The more I did, the more I noticed lots of little things that really made me enjoy it. In other games, questing requires can feel like an exercise in secretarial skills and requires constant tabbing – you tab to your journal, tab to your map, sometimes even tab out to a browser to look up a quest spoiler. Questing in *Rift*, however, is engaging and immersive. Several features make questing a more natural, intuitive experience. If I had a map open to look up quest locations and began to move, the map would fade a bit, so that I could see through it – very handy when trying to get my bearings. When I moused over a mob, not only would it show the name and level, but also the name of a quest it might be needed for and what I needed from it. In some quests, there are visual cues that show the results of your work and explain the storyline. All of these things make it easier to dive into the world, and the story of Telara.

One of the first things I encountered was a rift invasion. Rifts are tears in the protective ward of Telara, and as one opens up, planar beings break through and launch an invasion in the world. Seeing a rift for the first time is unforgettable, and I stood there amazed as huge black tentacles emerged from the sky, and bolts of light shot down to the ground. If players fight back against the planar invaders, they can repel the invasion and seal the tear. If not, it becomes a foothold, and the invaders establish control of the area. Because invasions can happen anywhere, they are a real threat to the cities and towns of Telara. Six different planes try to invade Telara: Life, Death, Fire, Air, Wind, and Water. Fortunately, none of them get along with each other, so two neighboring rifts will just as often attack each other as they attack Telara. There's no limit to the number of people who can participate in an invasion or a foothold event, and all rewards are shared by those who participate. The more who participate, the more challenging the invasion becomes, and the better the loot that's awarded at the end. It's a refreshing change from the competitive "That's my mob!" atmosphere found in many MMOs.

"Seeing a rift for the first time is unforgettable, and I stood there amazed as huge black tentacles emerged from the sky, and bolts of light shot down to the ground."

SOUL TO SQUEEZE

The other major feature of *Rift: Planes of Telara* is the soul system. Traditionally in MMOs, you choose your class during character creation, and that's who you are forever. In some games, you can tweak your abilities a bit and add little nuances, but you're still essentially the same class no matter what.

Rift's soul system is very different. There are four broad callings, or familiar archetypes: warrior, cleric, mage, and rogue. You choose one from the start, but within each one there are eight different "souls," or subclasses. In the early levels, you gain the abilities of only one of those souls, but as you level up, you can add souls, so that by the level cap, you can choose abilities from up to three souls. The souls within each calling have very different abilities, so a rogue can choose a soul focused on survivability or a soul that focuses on group enhancements.

The soul system is unique in that you aren't married to your choice of

role. You can create and save up to four combinations and swap out one combination for another. All ability points are saved in the profile, as well as hotbars and macros. If you pull a mob as a DPS-heavy rogue and end up dying, you can click a button and try again as a rogue tank without the need to see a trainer, port home, or pay tons of coin to switch. The soul system adds a new layer to group and raid gameplay, as people try to factor in various class combinations to particular scripts and encounters. It also makes grouping a lot easier. There's nothing worse than seeing four people begging in open channels for a particular class in order to get an optimal group setup. Now, five people can get together and do something, without needing the "holy trinity" of tank/healer/DPS.

The soul system will likely take some of the edge off the infamous nerf bat. Will there be tweaks and adjustments to the balance of the various souls? Most likely, since there's not an MMO out there that doesn't have to continually adjust class balance. But since chracters aren't stuck with one class, some class-balance issues can be alleviated with a click of a button.

"Both the soul system and dynamic invasions really confront the problems in MMOs that have frustrated players for years."

Both the soul system and dynamic invasions really confront the problems in MMOs that have frustrated players for years. Rift invasions give players a reason to revisit starter areas, places that normally empty out as a game ages. The unpredictability of invasions also gives plenty of opportunities for chance encounters with other players, who can then band together to make their own story in the world. The soul system makes grouping much more accessible and less dependant on fixed classes.

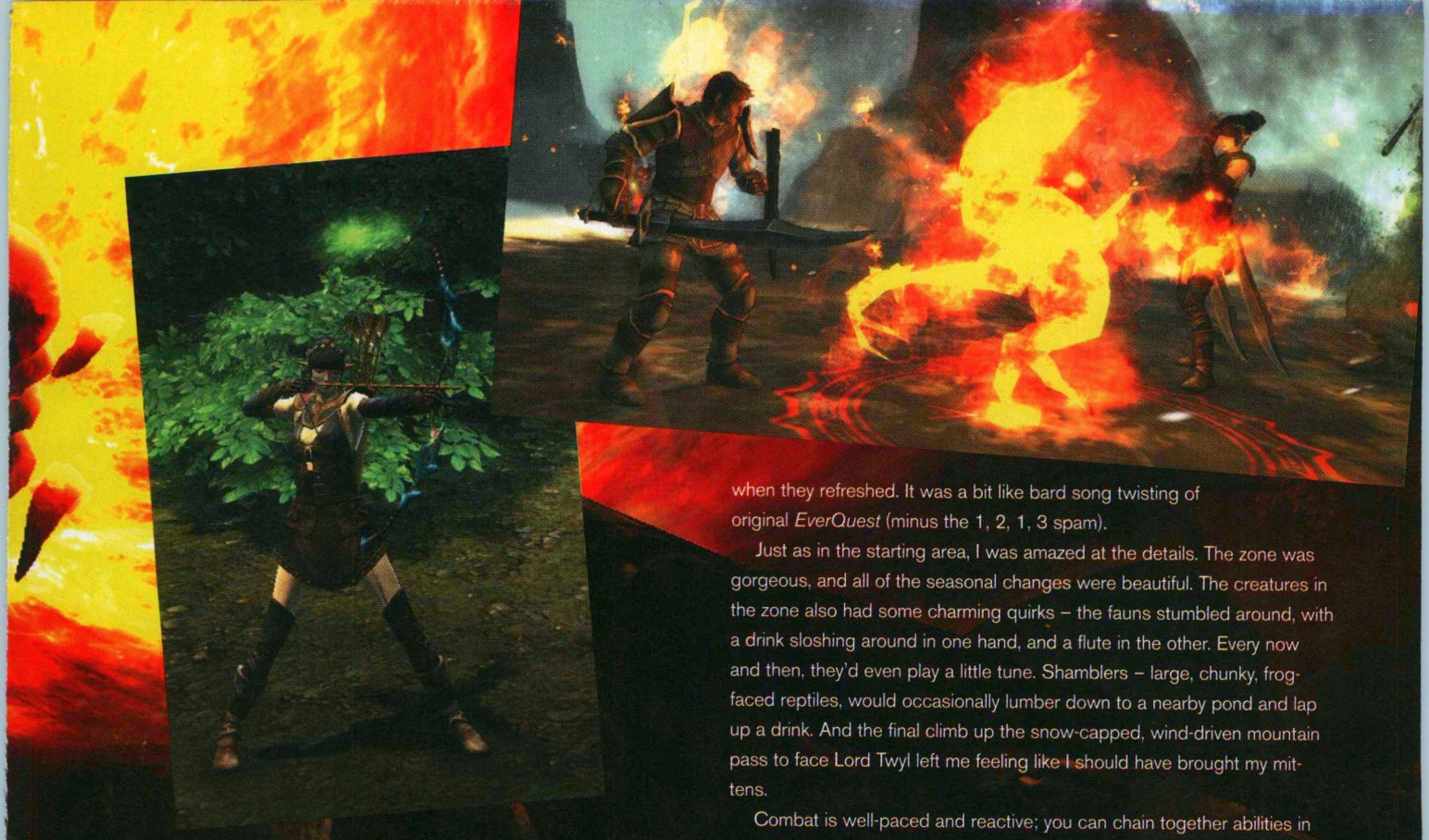
"THIS IS WHY THEY KEEP ME OFF THE FORUMS"

Over the summer, Trion Worlds launched a media blitz, showing off the game at conventions like E3, Gamescon, and PAX. Not surprisingly, the community following the game has grown, and includes many well-established guilds, fan site administrators, and community personalities. As the community grows, so does the level of anticipation and excitement over milestones like beta and the launch, and along with that is the frustration that comes with quieter news cycles. Luckily, Community Manager Cindy Bowens has it well under control. She's no stranger to community management, and she's seen the dramatic change in how game companies have come to embrace player fan sites and community personalities. During my visit, her day was filled with answering e-mails, joining a community IRC chat, participating in a podcast, and of course, babysitting me. Her main focus right now is managing expectations and trying to maintain a welcome atmosphere on the forums for newly registered fans of the game.

If Russ Brown, Vice President of Development, had his way, there would be 24/7 news updates, and Cindy's life would be much easier. He's eager to show off the game and didn't hesitate to answer every question I had. Yes, the various souls will be fairly easy to attain – they want players to be able to sample as many different combinations as possible. Yes, those really are wings on the paladin armor set. No, you can't fly. No, the Guardians and Defiant will not be able communicate with one another; the two factions will remain distinct and separate (and that seemed an emphatic no, despite the topic being highly debated on a couple of popular gaming forums).

One aspect of the game that they're working hard on right now is something Lead Designer Will Cook calls "direct agency." With "direct agency," NPCs will actually react to dynamic changes in the world. As a tear begins to form near a town, you will see and hear villagers pointing and commenting. Instead of seeing an NPC mindlessly standing by as a planar invasion opens over his head, he will react. As I was turning in a quest in the starting area, a scout came running up to call for help and warn of a rift invasion. Sure enough, just over the hill, a death rift had opened. Telara feels more compelling and alive because of the realization that, at any moment, you can be set upon by an invasion.

Rift's features are built with the idea that players will enjoy exploring them as much as the game itself. "They're toys," said Will. "The class sys-



tem is a toy. The dynamic content is a toy." They offer freedom away from the highly structured environment of recent MMOs. In a way, the Rift team is taking some of the common MMO maxims and challenging them, just a bit. With the addition of rifts, the team questions commonly held ideas like, "Towns and roads should be free of danger," or, "There shouldn't be any direct threat to a player in the first five levels." In older MMOs, there was less structure, but that sometimes led to bad player experiences. In newer games, there's a lot more structure, but a lack of open-ended gameplay. Rift hopes to balance both structure and freedom in its game.

"BIG, MESSY, AND YOU NEED TO BRING A FRIEND TO FINISH IT"

After lunch, I had a chance to group up with Amanda Fry, Rudy Phan, and Jason Knowlden, from the *Rift* team, to run the instance "Realm of the Fae." In this zone, the evil Lord Twyl uses his power over the seasons to cause havoc. I played a bard/assassin, so my focus was on damage output and providing group buffs. The bard class has several short-term buffs, ranging from group heals to damage increasers, to power regen buffs. I could really boost my group, but only if I paid attention and kept them up when they refreshed. It was a bit like bard song twisting of original *EverQuest* (minus the 1, 2, 1, 3 spam).

Just as in the starting area, I was amazed at the details. The zone was gorgeous, and all of the seasonal changes were beautiful. The creatures in the zone also had some charming quirks – the fauns stumbled around, with a drink sloshing around in one hand, and a flute in the other. Every now and then, they'd even play a little tune. Shamblers – large, chunky, frog-faced reptiles, would occasionally lumber down to a nearby pond and lap up a drink. And the final climb up the snow-capped, wind-driven mountain pass to face Lord Twyl left me feeling like I should have brought my mittens.

Combat is well-paced and reactive; you can chain together abilities in powerful combinations. There's also the sting of death, but players don't have to take time to go to town and repair or pay off large experience debt. Instead of item degradation, there's health degradation. Players return from death with a cap on their health, and that decreases with each death. Fortunately, there are consumables that help to counter this debt. The soul walk is another nice feature. Once every hour, players have the ability to revive exactly at the point where they died and come back immune to damage and aggro for a short period of time. That came in very handy after our group wiped to Lord Twyl, and time was running out on our group session. A quick soul walk (and some helpful dev powers) brought us victory.

I asked about raiding, and about open-world raid content in particular. Will Cook and Nick McDowell confirmed that there would be both instanced and open-world raiding. Raid instances will include lockout timers and challenging encounters. The open world content will include special raid rifts. Raid rifts are player triggered and there's no limit to how many players can participate. As Will described it, "Raid rifts are like the good old American cheeseburger: big, messy, and you need to bring a friend to finish it."

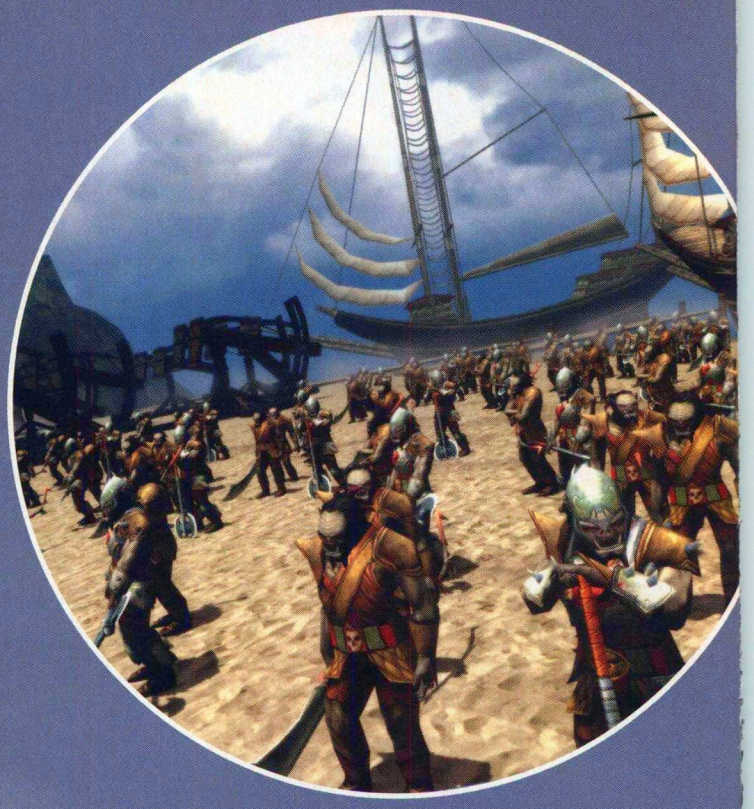
"LIKE A BOWLING ALLEY"

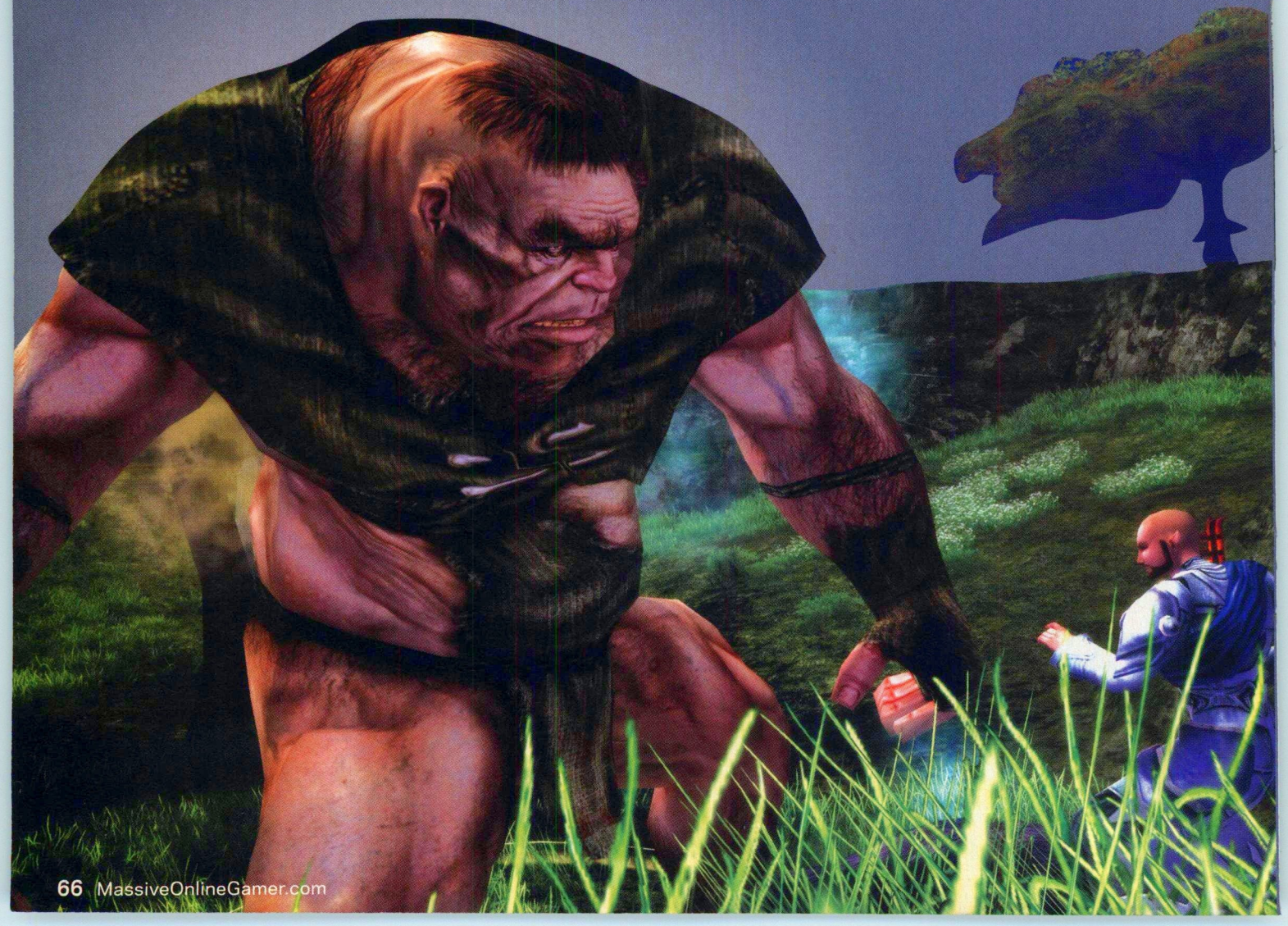
As I passed through the studio late in the afternoon, I noticed the tone had shifted since my earlier tour. Quiet focus had now become exuberant commotion. I found out that some of the team were trying out the new Warfront. (Yes, there will be instanced PvP in *Rift*!) It reminded me of the analogy Nick had used earlier to describe MMOs. He said they were a lot like a bowling alley: "You have the bowling alley, and the game of bowling, but you also have lots of other things: the clawfoot game, the pinball machine, even the snack bar. However, those things depend on bowling in order to be successful. It's the same with an MMO. You have to make the fundamental game work, and then work on the side games." Seeing Warfronts up and being tested is a great sign of their confidence in the core game of *Rift: Planes of Telara* – and in the progress of the game's development. It will be even more exciting to see the finished product when it's launched next year.

BY CHRIS MOLSBEE

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

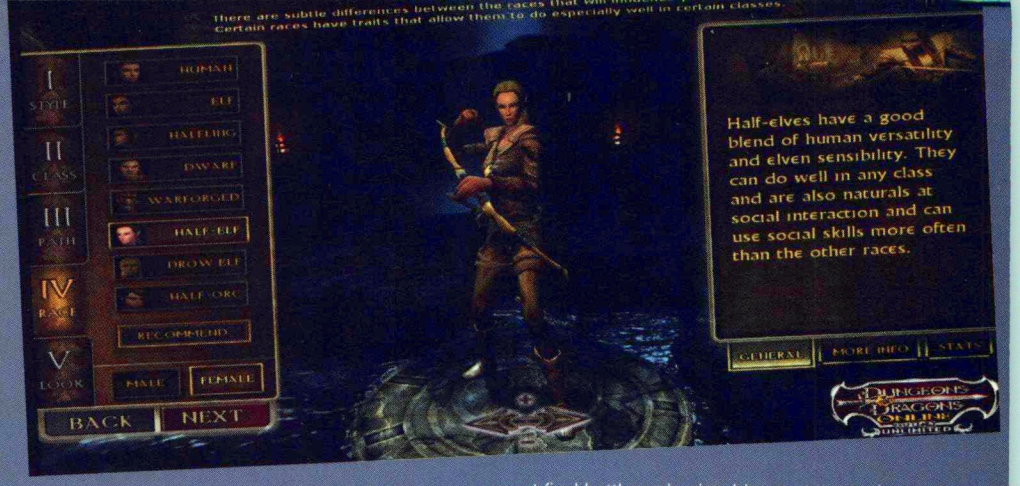
OUR EXCLUSIVE DEVELOPER TOUR OF DDO'S UPDATE 7





With *LOTRO* going free-to-play, some fans of *DDO* might have been concerned that their beloved franchise would get shafted, at least in the short term. Fortunately, that's not the case, and with Update 7, the dev team has gone out of its way to make *DDO* game experience unique and exciting for new players and veteran alike.

To show their commitment to both groups, they're adding three new free-to-play adventures. Designed for veteran players, these adventures will be set as level 12 quests within the "normal" play range (hard and elite settings will increase that difficulty), while new players will be attracted to the two new races in *DDO*: the half-elf (the beauty) and the half-orc (the beast). Lucky for you and me, I was able to get two of the best *DDO* team members, Design Director Ian Currie and Producer Erik Boyer, to give me a personal walkthrough of the new quests and a look at the two new races before they went live.


There are subtle differences between the races that allow them to do especially well in certain classes.
Certain races have traits that allow them to do especially well in certain classes.
I STYLE
II CLASS
III PATH
IV RACE
V LOOK
HUMAN
ELF
HALFLING
DWARF
WARFORGED
HALF-ELF
DROW ELF
HALF-ORC
RECOMMEND
MALE
FEMALE
BACK
NEXT
Half-elves have a good blend of human versatility and elven sensibility. They can do well in any class and are also naturals at social interaction and can use social skills more often than the other races.
GENERAL
MORE INFO
STATS
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE STORMREACH UNLIMITED

HALF HUMAN, ALL FUN

I started off by playing one of the new races coming out with Update 7, the half-elf (jokingly called the cheerleader of Stormreach – check out her dance moves and you'll see what I mean). Half-elves get the option of choosing from both the human and elf enhancement lists, giving them a huge variety of custom builds so you can mix and match your look to be more or less elven or human.

Half-elves also have some new feats to choose from. There's the Social Graces feat, which gives you an additional bluff, diplomacy, and intimidate check for your skills and is set to a different cool-down timer; and the Dilettante feat, which allows you to take class features from different classes. Feats like this and options on enhancements make the half-elf a very versatile race.

Next we have the race *DDO* fans have been asking for since the launch of the game: the half-orc! If word of mouth can be believed, then the half-orc will rapidly become one of the most popular races, perhaps even rivaling the popularity of the drow. Half-orcs have a natural +2 strength bonus and the most customizable appearance of any *DDO* race, and you can expect to see new enhancement and new feats for them right from the start and later on. Don't be surprised to see the Half-Orc become the dominant fighter in adventuring groups.

AGGRESSIVE DIPLOMACY

Three new adventures can be played as standalone quests or as an adventure chain; they're collectively known as the Droaam adventure pack. Droaam is a mysterious monster kingdom found in Eberron. This will also open up a new public area just off of the Marketplace called Lordmarch Plaza.

The first adventure is called Diplomatic Impunity. Your character is hired to initiate negotiations with the Droaam ambassador, a very seductive medusa. She claims that they're establishing a colony for the unrecognized nation of Khorvairian. Just to make sure she's not misleading you, your adventuring group scouts out the expedition and find not a colony, but a whole invasion army!

The next quest in the pack is called Frame Work. You find out from your contacts that Droaam is trying to build an alliance with a local tribe of minotaurs to help them with their invasion plans. The only way to stop this deadly alliance is to use some trickery of your own. Your adventuring group must use a flesh-to-stone wand to petrify leaders of the minotaur tribe, thus framing the Droaam medusa ambassador for the crime.

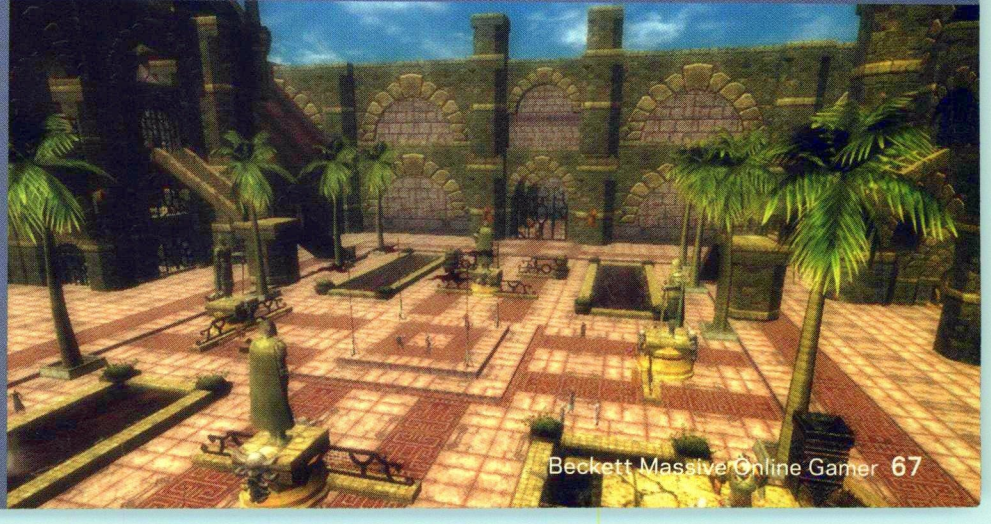
The third and final quest of the chain is called Eyes of Stone. Now that the Droaam ambassador, the medusa, has been framed, you have to arrest her. Arresting a medusa is a dilemma in itself, but it soon gets even harder. She's already placed the palace under siege and has petrified all the Coinlords, so you have to rescue them, too. Fully platemailed ogres beating on you, a medusa trying to turn you to stone… what a great final battle and enjoyable way to spend an evening.

ODDS AND ENDS

The dev team has been listening to the players, as reflected in a few other juicy tidbits. With Update 7, they'll be introducing The Chronoscope, a new level 6 raid adventure. The raid will also have a level 20 epic setting for higher-level characters who want to take a run at it. Nat Gann, a performing artist, vanished in the market square during the devil invasion live event, and his father and sister hire you to find out what happened to him. By using an ancient device, players will travel back to the day of the devil invasion and find out what really happened to Nat Gann.

As if all that wasn't enough for a update, the *DDO* team has added bold and fresh new user interface graphics, from the character sheets to the auction house. They've also improved the character inventory so you can search your own backpack for items and have them list items in several different categories. The auction house has also received this new makeover; being able to find items and listings in record speed in the auction house is a big bonus.

There were so many new things added to the game in Update 7 that I don't have time or space to go over them all. The best way to learn more about them is to log into *DDO* and experience them for yourself. See you in Stormreach!



BY MICHAEL VENABLES

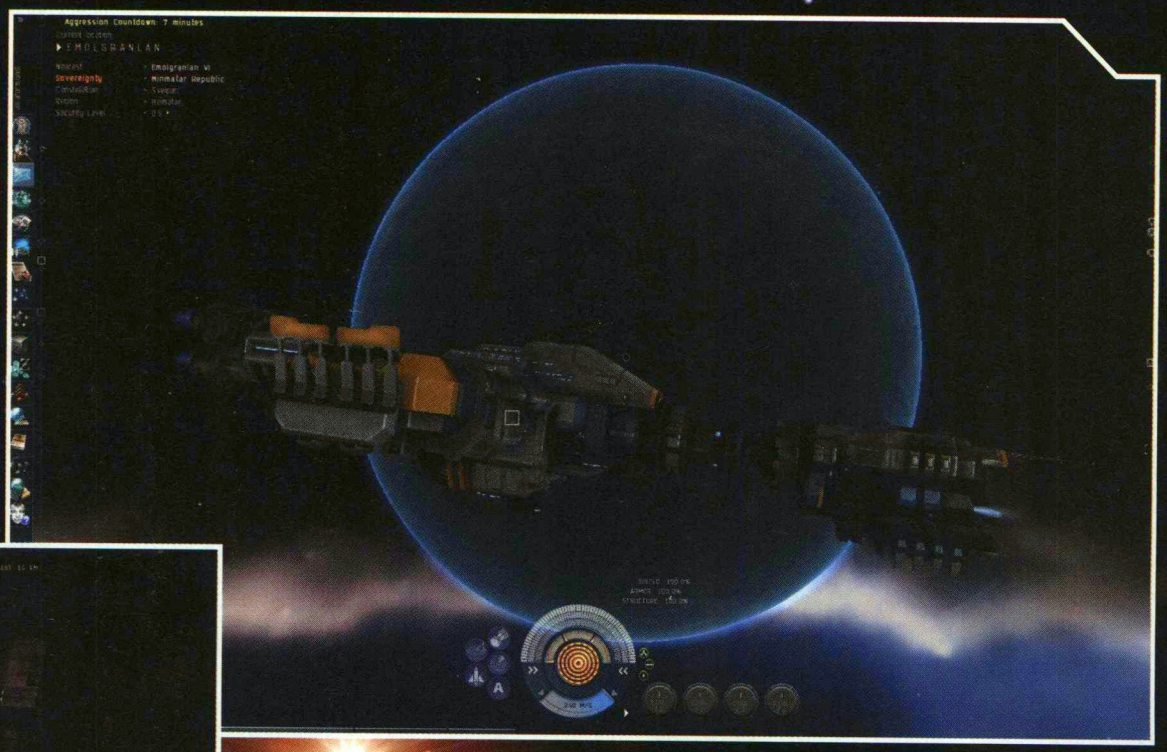
Learning to Fly

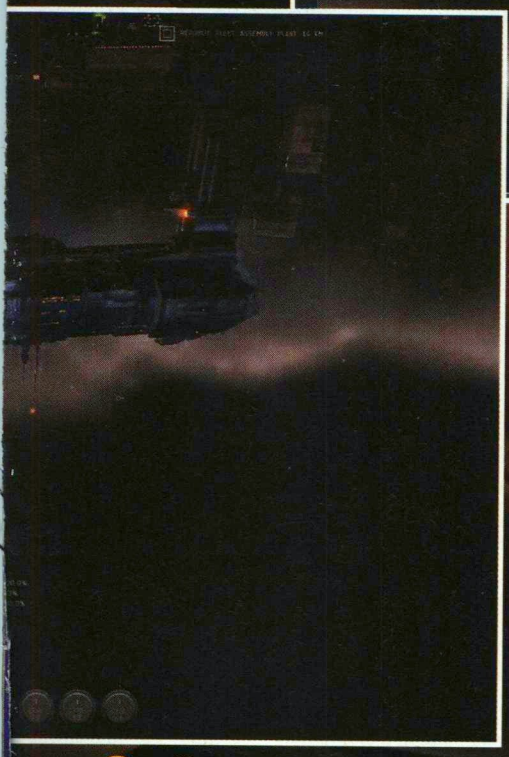
Four top tips to get you started in Eve Online

For years, you've probably been hearing about this awesome MMO called *Eve Online*, where you can blow up stuff in starships – but you've also heard that *Eve* has the steepest learning curve of any MMO on the market. Here is a quick guide to help new players understand some of the core concepts that drive your character's in-game success, such as race/character selection and skill training, and how these choices ultimately affect the development of your character's profession in *Eve Online*.

1. Establish goals for the kind of game you want to play. What are your personal tastes as far as race and profession? What background story do you think is the coolest? Do you want to mine asteroids or blow stuff up? Take my race, for example: Minmatar with a Verokhior bloodline. I liked the background story, and wanted to be a Han Solo-like drifter and forge my own destiny. Once you choose a career, it's good to take advantage of the bonus your bloodline has for certain base attributes: memory, intelligence, perception, willpower and charisma. If you want to be an engineer, it would be wise to choose a bloodline that gives a bonus to intelligence, the base attribute that affects the training of this skill. You'll want the best attribute "set" that efficiently advances the career path you've selected for your personal gameplay tastes. All players begin with the same set of core attributes, with a slightly variant distribution, dependent on race/bloodline. (This gets a little more complicated and is beyond the scope of this article.) Attributes affect the speed at which you train skills, so increasing them will increase your "learning speed," which is highly desirable – no one wants to train forever to learn a skill.

"[My first ship was] Ugly as sin, but with it, I could mine and defend myself from "rats" (NPC pirates hell-bent on destroying you as you make your meager living mining a far-off asteroid belt).





2. After you choose your career path, learn the skills for your character's profession, and begin earning a living – which means making ISK (Interstellar Credits, the currency of New Eden)! Skills have many functions: They give you various functional roles such as which type of ships, weapons, and equipment your characters can use, as well as advanced skills, such as corporation management, managing refineries, or directing mining operations. Skills also influence how efficiently characters can use the various equipment on their ships, or "modules."

To all you other MMO players: *Eve* has no leveling! *Ever*yone has the same potential to train the same skills.) You can even train your core attributes to higher levels. The key is always to have a skill in training, as you drop your freshly purchased skill in your skill queue and train it in real time. But once you slap that cool Spaceship Command skill in your queue, use that mining skill you just completed, and start earning some ISK, since you'll need it to purchase skillbooks (more on this later). As far as using ship equipment, all characters are given the noob ship of their race. Flying noob ships simply requires learning [insert *Eve* race] Frigate I. For me, a Minmatar, this was Minmatar Frigate Ik which gave me the Reaper. Ugly as sin, but with it, I could mine and defend myself from "rats" (NPC pirates hell-bent on destroying you as you make your meager living mining a far-off asteroid belt).

Skill training is what really sets *Eve* apart from other MMOs. It's like being back in school – you want to learn to fly Caldari instead of Minmatar? Buy the skillbook and start the learning countdown, just like you did in your [insert most hated high-school subject] class, only this time it's something you can use – well, in *Eve* anyway…

3. After you choose your character, train the main learning skills to level five. Analytical Mind, Instant Recall, and Learning are generally the most influential for learning new skills, since they increase your core attributes. Take a look at your character and see what skills are required for your career path. This will determine which attributes you will need the most. This will, by default, dictate the learning skills that affect the attributes important to your character. Oh, and you'll have to buy what is known as a "skillbook," the *Eve* term for a character "skill set." It's not immediately apparent that you have to actually purchase the skill books, but you do (although some skillbooks are awarded in the tutorials). Training the learning skills can increase your base attributes (memory, intelligence, perception, willpower, and charisma) by up to five points. Analytical Mind (intelligence), Instant Recall (memory), and Learning (the actual core learning skill) are the most important of the learning skills. Players who choose combat characters will want to train attributes that enhance combat skills, such as perception (primary attribute that affects this skill) and willpower (secondary attribute that affects this skill).

One of the great things about *Eve* is that you can do anything in New Eden, the *Eve* online universe. Then, after you choose your race/bloodline/character, you can train the skills to fly the ships of other races, too. It's wise to be able to fly more than one race's ships, since this allows your character to be more versatile.

4. Go through all the tutorials! There re always players who thinks they're too advanced of a gamer to need tutorials. You will be humbled in *Eve*, believe me. The tutorials offer a wealth of information. Some of the tutorials award skillbooks, items, ships, and even implants – all valuable items when you're beginning your new life in the fantastic universe of New Eden.

FUN FACT:
***Eve Online* has more players than the population of CCP Games' native Iceland.**

BY TOM PURDUE

Clockwise from upper left: Leah Rubin, Vlad Judys, Justin Wingard, Karl Holbert.

QUESTING
THE KINGSISLE PROVINCE AND THE TURF OF **GDC AUSTIN**

Although Austin, Texas conjures up images of fun night life and live music in country/western bars for people across the world, millions of young (and not-so-young) *Wizard101* players see Austin as the place where Headmaster Ambrose and the Ravenwood School of Magic were birthed from.

While southern Austin pulses with live music and entertainment, with an accordion for every breakfast taco stand, in Northern Austin stands a newer area full of upscale outlets, hotels, and business spaces called "The Domain." Building D5 at The Domain houses a number of companies (including a subdivision of Electronic Arts on the second floor); down on the first floor is where you'll find the stronghold of KingsIsle Entertainment, which I was lucky enough to visit last month as part of a fantastic, fun-filled three-day trip to Austin, KingsIsle, and the Game Developer Conference taking place downtown.

PIT DELVING AND CELESTIA DIVING

The entry room at the KingsIsle office boasts large, colorful posters of characters from the game, including one of Malistaire Drake (the original bad guy) himself. Not many have an opportunity to venture beyond Malistaire's poster and on into the restricted areas of KingsIsle; however, on Oct. 6, 2010, Jason Winter, Editor of Beckett *Massive Online Gamer*, and I, Tom Purdue (a.k.a. The Friendly Necromancer), had the good fortune to journey beyond Malistaire's spot on the wall.

Our journey was led by William Haskins, one of KingsIsle's lead producers. Haskins guided us through the offices of the 120 or so employees who seemed to either reside in side offices or sit side-by-side out in multiple rows of tables in spacious rooms. These open areas in the KingsIsle office space are commonly referred to by employees as "art pits" or simply "the Pit." [Don't worry, it's not nearly as infernal as it sounds –JW]

Upon our arrival in the Pit, Haskins clapped his hands together, alerted the *Wizard101* team to our presence (which resulted in a slew of the more "secret" screens being shut down), and beckoned us over to the computer of Karl Holbert, Art Lead for Wizard101. Karl showed us the Celestia Base Camp, which is the soon-to-be-released hub zone of the new expansion for *Wizard101*. From what Holbert showed us, the Marleybonian dog race has been busy putting their steampunk machinery to good work building underwater domes for our wizards to explore.

Next, we were led to another computer where we were treated to renders of the new Swift Gryphon mount that is soon to be released on a GameStop card KingsIsle is calling the "double-wide." Fred Howard, Vice President of the Marketing Department, took us into his office and ran through the massive fantasy palace that also comes bundled with the new double-wide card. In a nutshell, the double-wide is KingsIsle's answer to a boxed version of their online game. It's packed full of enough goodies and crowns to make any *Wizard101* player happy for a long time.

TIME OUT WITH THE BAD BOYS OF WIZARD101

At the end of our tour, we were guided to a side lounge room full of bean bags, couches, and chairs to which we were pretty much quarantined, since KingsIsle is also busy working on a secretive second project . . . and secretive is how they wanted to keep it.

Ben Conrad, Public Relations Guru for KingsIsle, brought an entourage of employees into the lounge room for an informal chat about whatever subjects we wanted to bring up. Our hosts included Karl Holbert; Leah Ruben, Producer of Wizard101; Justin Wingard, Lead Designer for *Wizard101*; and Vlad Judys, Lead Software Engineer for *Wizard101*. Our

"It's like seeing the first tracks on fresh snow when we get to see people experiencing the world."

Justin Wingard, Wizard101 Lead Designer

discussion was informal, light, and fun, and topics jumped everywhere from the concerns of players about Celestia to how the team juggles work between departments.

When asked if the zone structure and appearance of Celestia would be similar to the previous worlds, Holbert noted that many surprises lurk in the real estate of Celestia and promised players lots of interesting hidden nooks for them to explore. "As far as scope, we were surprised when design originally handed us the list of zones," joked Holbert. "We were like, umm . . ." he said, trailing off with a stunned facial expression.

Holbert went on to indicate 1) Celestia was built along the same complexity and uniqueness lines as the zone structure in Grizzleheim, which is a complex world that came about shortly after the available art team personnel quadrupled, and 2) Celestia will be beyond the expanse of Dragonspyre, which was the existing "end world" before Celestia.

> "We were surprised when design originally handed us the list of zones. We were like, ummm..."
>
> Karl Holbert, Wizard101 Art Lead

The group was in consensus on its excitement to see players' reactions to the upcoming release. Ruben commented, "It's like seeing the first tracks on fresh snow when we get to see people experiencing the world." Wingard added, "I'm looking forward to hearing feedback from people on the test realms because we worked on it for so long now that it's kind of hard for us to have fresh eyes on it."

Judys interjected, "The advantage of art is you can show it to people; I cannot show lines of code to people and have them get excited about it." After the chuckles died down, Conrad explained how Judys is one of the "unsung heroes" of *Wizard101* and noted it really is the effort from the engineers that ensures things work seamlessly. Judys told a story of setting up *Wizard101* for a friend's child to play on an old Pentium 2 computer, "It was slow, but when it worked, it really made me proud because I thought, 'Look at that crappy seven- or eight-year-old machine,' but it was still running."

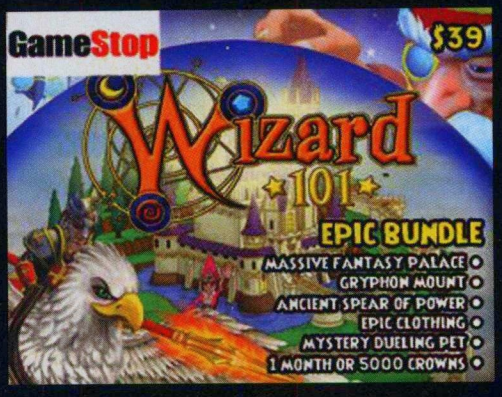
Ruben explained the extent to which Celestia had been quality checked. "Each zone has been run through at least three times by three different people. We've had design run through their content. We've had QA running through everything. Plus, we've also had a peer review from another designer, so they've gotten at least three sets of eyes and one of them fresh." Ruben continued to explain the effort demonstrated here is a part of an ongoing push for quality from KingsIsle to ensure updates to Wizard101 are as enjoyable as possible right at release.

A big part of ensuring players enjoy the mechanics of *Wizard101* falls

STOCKING STUFFER

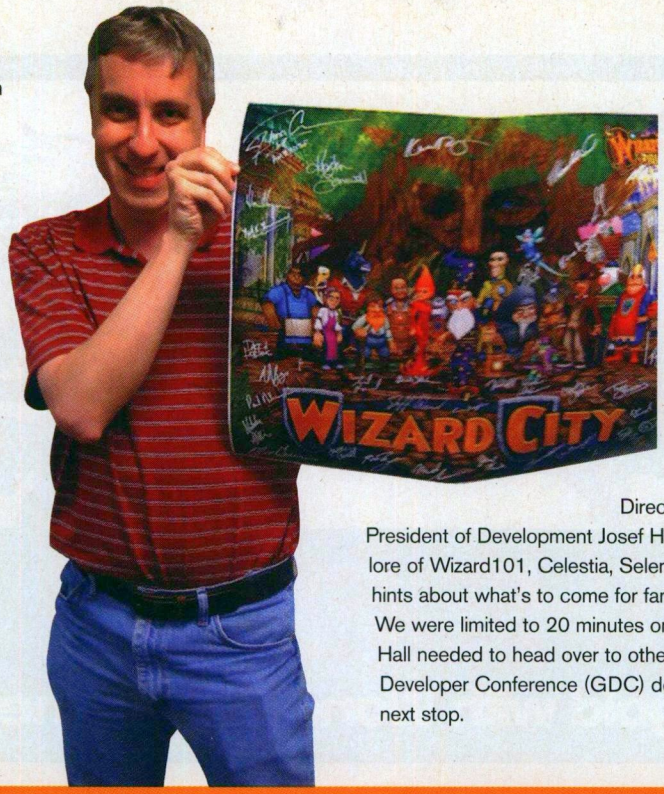
Looking for a last-minute gift for the *Wizard101* fan on your shopping list? Check out the *Wizard101* Epic Bundle Game Card! This $39 card is a GameStop exclusive that grants your wizard a slew of awesome goodies, such as:

- A massive fantasy palace, with personal dueling arena and minigame kiosk
- A flying gryphon mount
- An ancient spear for players of all levels
- A powerful and mysterious dueling pet
- One month premium content access or 5,000 Crowns
- An additional housing slot



largely in the laps of Wingard and his team of designers. In response to some fears that players wouldn't have enough experience to get from level 50 to 60, Wingard reassured that wouldn't be the case. "We wanted players to have some experience at the level cap where they can go around wiping out mobs." Wingard also discussed at length the new critical and block systems being introduced into the game to give players more strategy and power. "It's going to work like critical hit systems you might see in other games where you have a spell that has a certain chance of doing extra damage any time you're casting it." Wingard continued by explaining blocks would be the counter to critical hits, since it's most likely to be a big element of PvP at level 60.

After 40 minutes or so of chatting, it was lunchtime and our time with the KingsIsle crew was drawing to an end. A final reassurance was issued that things were going well with crunch time at KingsIsle. As Ruben put it, "We were working crazy crazy hours last weekend, and now we're sitting here with smiles on our faces."



After a wholesome Texas BBQ lunch, we returned to KingsIsle one final time to record a quick podcast with Vice President/Creative Director J. Todd Coleman and Vice President of Development Josef Hall. Discussion points included the lore of Wizard101, Celestia, Selena Gomez, and even a few cryptic hints about what's to come for fans of the game and the company. We were limited to 20 minutes on the podcast, since Coleman and Hall needed to head over to other awaiting interviews at the Game Developer Conference (GDC) downtown – which was also our next stop.

Listen to our Wizard101 podcast at **www.massiveonlinegamer.com!**

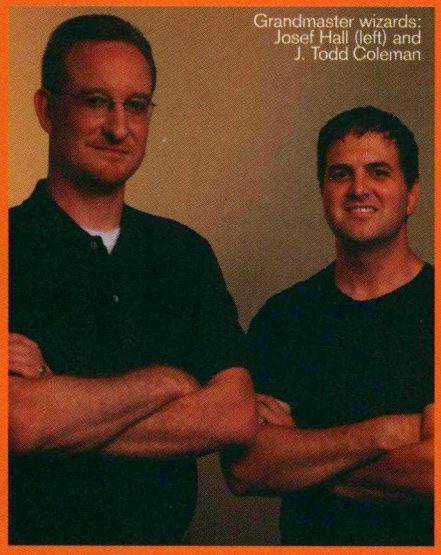
The swagger of GDC Austin

GDC Austin is really a three-fold conference (events, expo floor, and sessions and speakers) all centered at the Austin Conference Center. The conference center is the heart of downtown Austin – right where all that live music pulses. The magic of Sixth Street is well within walking distance, as are a number of other great Austin locales. Although some valuable information-sharing happens from the fantastic sessions and panels inside the conference center, the bonds and camaraderie between game developers was the real "happening," and afterparties abounded.

Down on the expo floor, a number of great booths represented swaths of companies and organizations, with everything from video game schools to makers of slot machines. Two booths that stood out as being potentially interesting to *Wizard101* players were the Rixty and Vivox booths.

Rixty is a growing purchasing solution for a lot of free-to-play games. In addition to their game cards, this past year Rixty has become integrated with the Coinstar booths you might see at your local grocery store, where people can dump their bottles of spare change into a Coinstar machine and receive back larger bills or perhaps a Rixty code for virtual currency in exchange. You can't currently use Rixty cash in *Wizard101*, but there have been casual discussions between the two companies in the past.

Vivox is a leader in voice integration with MMO titles, including the upcoming DC Universe Online. Voice integration is a hard sell for many kids/family MMOs due to safety and


Grandmaster wizards: Josef Hall (left) and J. Todd Coleman

security concerns, but the guys at Vivox maintained they have kids themselves and their company has built-in features to keep their own kids safe on the Internet. They cautioned that if you don't control your own voice communication in a game, kids will likely use a third-party program to circumvent you completely.

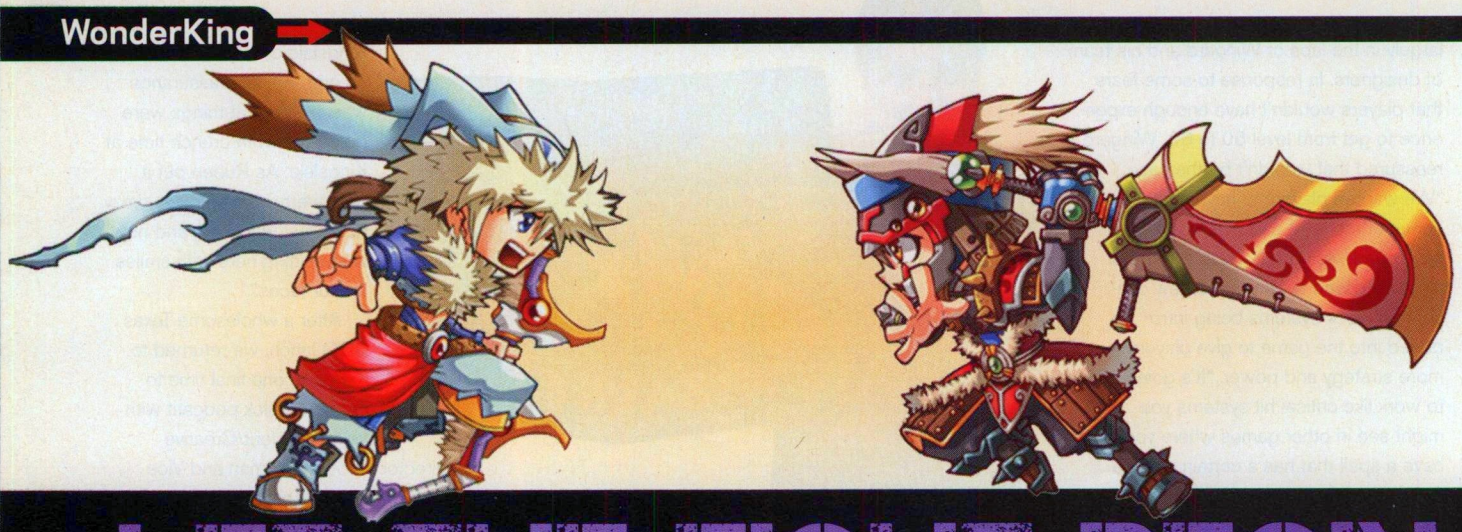
Even if voice integration would probably never happen in *Wizard101*, it was an interesting conversation that hinted to other things Vivox could provide, like the ability to stream an audio channel into games for people to tune in to. If that was the case with *Wizard101*, then perhaps everyone could have simultaneously enjoyed the great 60-minute session hosted by Coleman and Hall at GDC Austin where the topic at hand was "*Shadowbane* to *Wizard101*: A Tale of Two Cities."

For those who don't know, many of the same people responsible for *Shadowbane* and Wolfpack Studios are also the creative forces behind *Wizard101* and KingsIsle; Coleman and Hall are among those stalwarts. Both games had similar origins: Both started first in home offices, had innovative designs, and were niche market games and turned out to be larger than expected. However, from there, *Wizard101* and Shadowbane become two entirely different beasts: the ideas behind the games, the marketing strategies used, the pre-production processes involved, and ultimately the successes of the games, were all very different.

A lot of tough lessons were learned for Coleman and Hall from the experience of making Shadowbane. As Coleman joked at the beginning of the session, "There are a lot of lessons that you learn from both doing one that goes really well and one that goes badly. We've had the fortune or misfortune now of seeing both paths, and, at the end, we will surprise you by telling you which path we prefer."

Coleman and Hall's session at GDC Austin was only one among many. During business hours at the conference there's usually at least three or four speakers running simultaneously throughout the week. GDC Austin was everything a game developer or any interested party could hope for in a conference, and KingsIsle was well represented.

Thanks to KingsIsle for playing fantastic hosts for Beckett *Massive Online Gamer* during this event and within its offices. Onward to Celestia!



LET THE FIGHT BEGIN

Go for the gold with WonderKing's new PvP system

At nDoors, we're taking *WonderKing*'s player-versus-player (PvP) system to the next level! We're revamping *WonderKing*'s PvP with numerous new PvP-dedicated skills and more exciting competitive maps. We're also rolling out a brand new Reward System for players to buy amazing equipment with their PvP points. There are many more anticipated features to come, so be prepared to do battle!

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With just one click of a button, you'll instantly be teleported to the battlefield. Many heroes will battle one another wishing to be recognized as the strongest in the *WonderKing* world. Winning battles will help earn you points and a deserved title, while losing battles will have the opposite effect and impede your growth. Show no mercy to your rivals and defeat them with one purpose: To become the WonderKing in PvP!

Powerful skills

To differentiate between the PvE and PvP gameplay, the developers of *WonderKing* have created exclusive skills just for the new PvP system. These skills can only be used during PvP combat, which will create a better balance for both PvE and PvP gameplay. With new skills in players' arsenal, we're sure to see more exciting and fascinating PvP battles!

Competitive maps

There are already plenty of PvP maps available in *WonderKing*, but they mostly lack environmental obstacles and traps that help make the PvE combat in *WonderKing* so engaging. Moving forward, the developers intend to create more maps to satisfy our users, who love to battle through obstacles such as ice, spikes, fire, and more! It will be interesting to see how players will use these new obstacles to their advantage. Those who master the environment around them and use it as part of their tactics can greatly turn the match in their favor.

Reward system

Players who PvP their way to victory will not go unnoticed. As players win battles, they will accumulate PvP points that can be used to purchase newly released PvP equipment. Depending on your rank and level, you'll be able to choose from a variety of armor and weapons. Gain recognition as an elite PvP contender wearing this special equipment and strike fear into the hearts of your rivals!

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ARE YOU THE BIGGEST *Star Wars®*: Clone Wars Adventures™ FAN IN THE GALAXY?

Now, you can prove it by sending us a screenshot of your character doing whatever he or she does best, whether that be posing, dueling, or just hanging out. The one we deem the best (with Master Yoda's™ help, of course) will win a fantastic suite of prizes that would even make a Senator jealous!

ONE (1)

Grand Prize winner will be designated the Star Wars: Clone Wars Adventures Ultimate Fan and will receive:

- A lifetime membership to the game *
- 1,000 Station Cash
- In-game R2-D2™ pet
- And will be featured in the next issues of Beckett Fun Online Games and Massive Online Gamer

FIVE (5)

Runners-up will receive a cool Star Wars: Clone Wars Adventures Galactic Passport package, which includes

- 90-day membership
- Exclusive Togruta playable character
- 500 Station Cash
- Yoda monitor topper
- And other cool stuff!

To enter, send your screenshot to FOG@beckett.com with the subject "Clone Wars Adventures Contest." Only one entry per account, please. Entries are due by December 10.

Lucasfilm Entertainment Company Ltd. and Lucasfilm Ltd. are not sponsors of the Contest, and are not responsible for any obligations herein.

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* for the life of the game

For full contest details, visit www.massiveonlinegamer.com/cwacontestrules

By JASON WINTER

MICRO VOLTS

MicroVolts thinks small, plays big

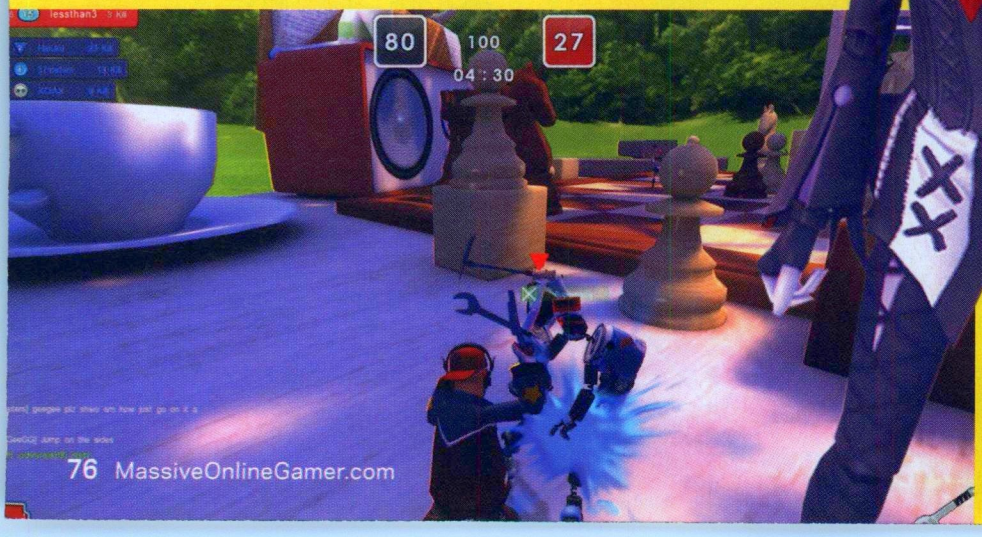
If you're tired of the typical offering of clichéd shooter characters – usually some take on a grizzled military (or ex-military) macho man, psycho trigger-happy lunatic, or leather-clad babe – and the same old environments – abandoned factories, secretive enemy bases, or military installations – then Rock Hippo Production's *MicroVolts* might be for you. OK, so the characters are macho, trigger-happy, and babe-alicious (not all at once, thankfully), but what sets them apart is that they're action figures, waging their 1/12-scale war for power (as in electrical current, not world domination) in a variety of household environments.

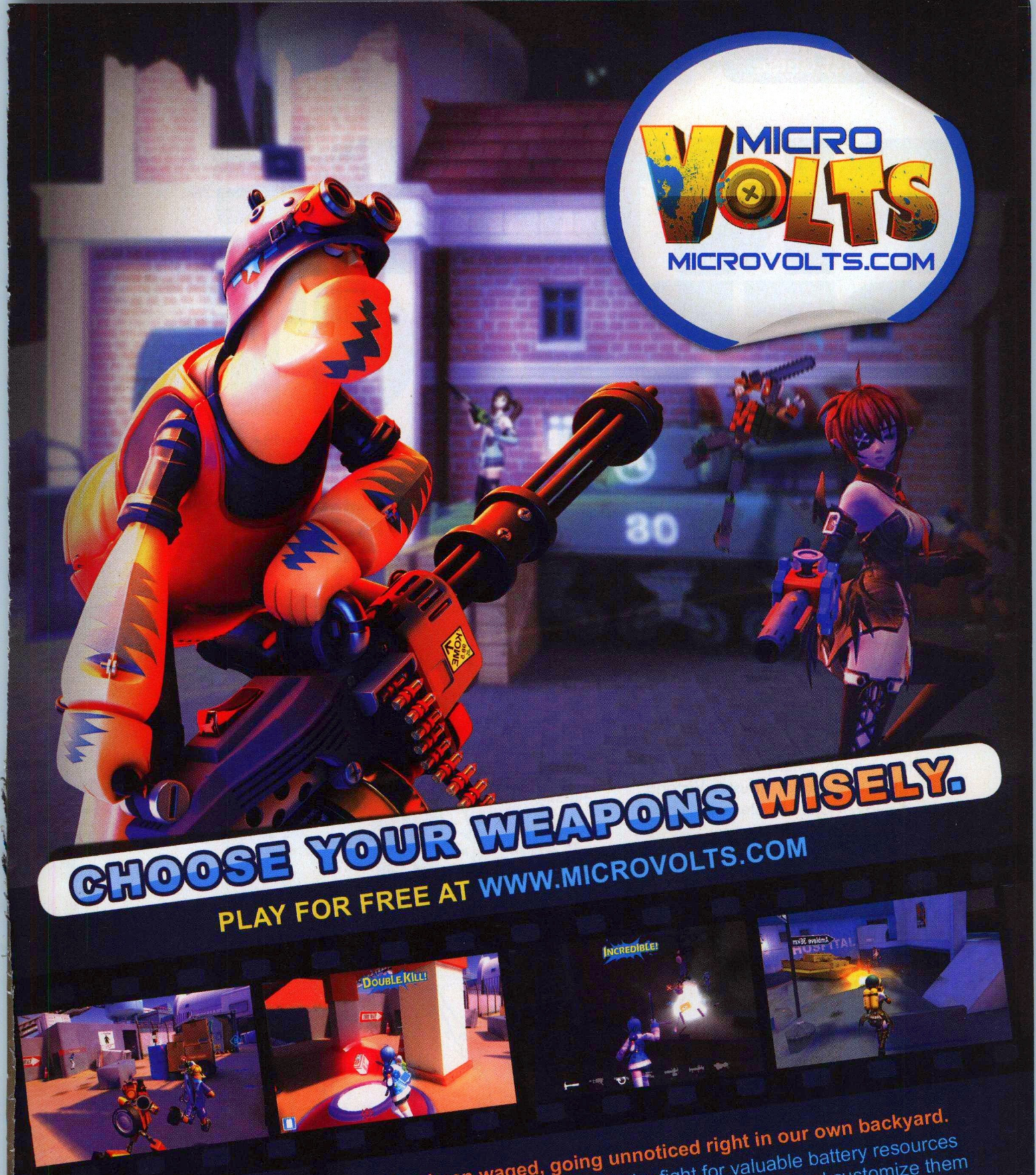
A third-person shooter, *MicroVolts* has many of the amenities shooter fans are accustomed to: seven different weapons, ranging from the action-figure versions of assault rifles, rocket launchers, gatling guns, and more; five game modes, both team and free-for-all; clans; statistics and ranks; and seven maps that offer plenty of strategy options.

MicroVolts is a free-to-play game with optional cash transactions, and you will have to pony up the green to improve your character. Two characters, the perky Naomi and brash Knox, are available at the start of the game, while the devilish Pandora and shoddily assembled C.H.I.P. need to be unlocked. All characters have the same base capabilities, but alternate clothes options offer slightly increased stats. And, of course, you'll want to upgrade your weapons as quickly as possible, to increase your killing potential.

Perhaps the most nicely surprising thing about *MicroVolts* is that, due to the artificial nature of the characters, it's not as violent as most shooters. The characters bust apart, LEGO-style, when "killed," and there's no blood. Even the weapons are painted in bright, cartoony shades. (Really, who wouldn't want a lime-green shotgun?) If you've got a youngster who craves the shooter action of a *Call of Duty* or a *Halo*, you could do worse than sit him down with MicroVolts to both satisfy his action fix and your distaste for explicit violence.

MicroVolts is currently in beta, with a planned release before the end of 2010. You can check it out at www.MicroVolts.com. Just stay the hell away from my battery…





For ages, a secret battle has been waged, going unnoticed right in our own backyard. Get ready to face opponents from across the globe in the fight for valuable battery resources and supremacy of the Micro World. Choose from 4 limited edition figures and customize them with a ton of parts, accessories, and 7 different devastating weapon types. Will you be a one man army, or the ultimate team player? You choose.

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BY JASON WINTER

PICTURE PERFECT

Sure, we all love a gripping storyline, tight controls, and memorable characters, but let's face it: beautiful scenery and pretty explosions are nice, too.

We touched base with graphic design students currently enrolled (and one alumnus) in some of the top computer graphics programs in the nation to find out what got them into the biz, the challenges they face, and how their projects are coming along.

The Artists

Name: Peng Sun
Age: 24
Hometown: Jinan, China
University: University of Houston-Victoria
Field of study/Major: Master of Science in Computer Information Systems

Name: Lisa Fleck
Age: 20
Hometown: Buffalo, N.Y.
University: Full Sail University Graduate
Field of study/Major: Game Art Bachelor of Science Degree Program

Name: Travis Ripley
Age: 30
Hometown: San Diego, Calif.
University: Art Institute of California, San Diego
Field of study/Major: Game Art and Design/Casual Game Development

Name: Bailey Applegate
Age: 23
Hometown: Sturbridge, MA
University: Becker College
Field of study/Major: Computer Game Design

What made you decide to pursue a career in graphic design for video games?

Travis: As with most of the people of my generation, I grew up playing video games. I was always curious how they made that happen and why I was being pulled towards particular colors and shapes. The psychology behind it fascinated me, along with the storytelling aspect. I've always felt that my interaction with the game was so intimate, and I used to imagine that the world around me was a game, where I would draw characters and places I wanted to be in, because the current one was so boring. Growing up as the "weird kid" had its ups and downs. It made me strong, gave me personality, and challenged me to be independent and create my own answers to questions that no one could answer.

I didn't know how to pursue a career in game design, but after taking many classes in college, a co-worker referred me to the program he was starting at the Art Institute of California, San Diego. I visited the campus, conversed with the counselors and students, enrolled, and the rest was history. After graduation, I wanted to pursue another art direction and worked at Flying Panther Tattoo. As shop assistant, I learned a lot about art from self-taught artists. I learned about casual gaming at the Game Developers Conference, but there wasn't a lot of info available until I came across *Casual Connect* magazine, and I happened to find a Tweet from a former colleague about this new program at UCSD for Casual Game Development, I knew right then and there that this was my calling, so I called them right away, signed up, and here I am a year later creating games and mobile apps.

Lisa: I first starting thinking about pursuing a career in video game design after watching the making of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. There was a section on texture artists and their daily tasks. I thought that it was probably the coolest job anyone could ever have, and I knew I wanted to use my artistic skills in my career. I also played video games constantly, so I put two and two together and delved into researching game art. The more I looked into it, the more I wanted to be a part of this growing industry focused on creativity and entertainment.

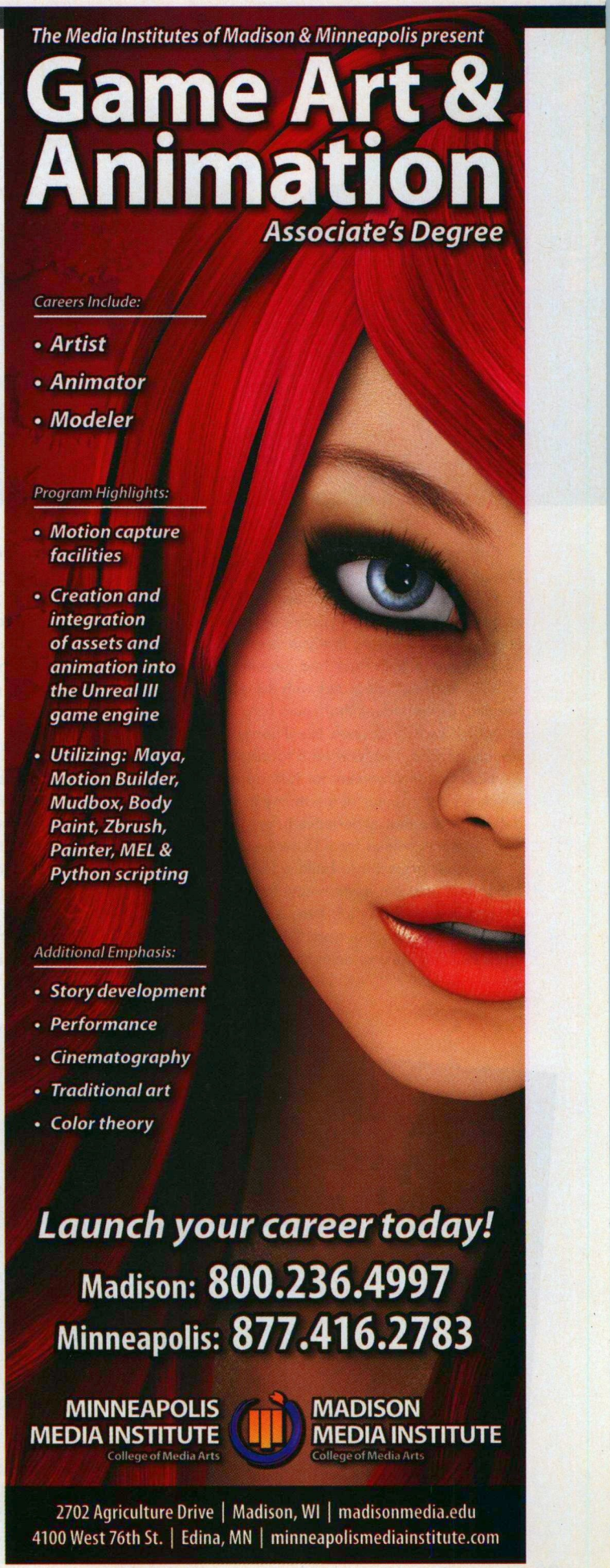
Peng: The graphic design field for video games is a very exciting field to work in. The technologies are updated frequently, the participants meet great challenges, and they have to adapt to new knowledge all the time. I love challenges, and this is an amazing career field!

Bailey: At my high school graduation, I got together with my friends and made a pact that we would start a game company together. So far I'm the closest to that goal, but I hope the others will catch up to me soon.

Please describe some of your projects, past or present.

Peng: I have worked with several projects related to game design. The first one is a 2-D Pong game based on Visual Studio 2005 using Open GL. It's really a simply one but it has all the necessary elements for a game: game plate, round ball, user interaction, and game AI. With this project, I gained a lot of experience with Open GL, which is a basic library for game design, and learned how to make a game fascinating by adjust the speed and rhythm of the game.

The second one is a battle level based on Unreal Development Kit (UDK) 2010. This was a more complex video game than the prior one. I made a terrain for the player to operate an aircraft or battle vehicle, with some building and kismet sequences to play with the AI or other players. During the development process, I got very interested in developing a game using a ripe development kit. I can save a lot of time on some basic elements but pay most of my attention to the other, more interesting aspect of the game design.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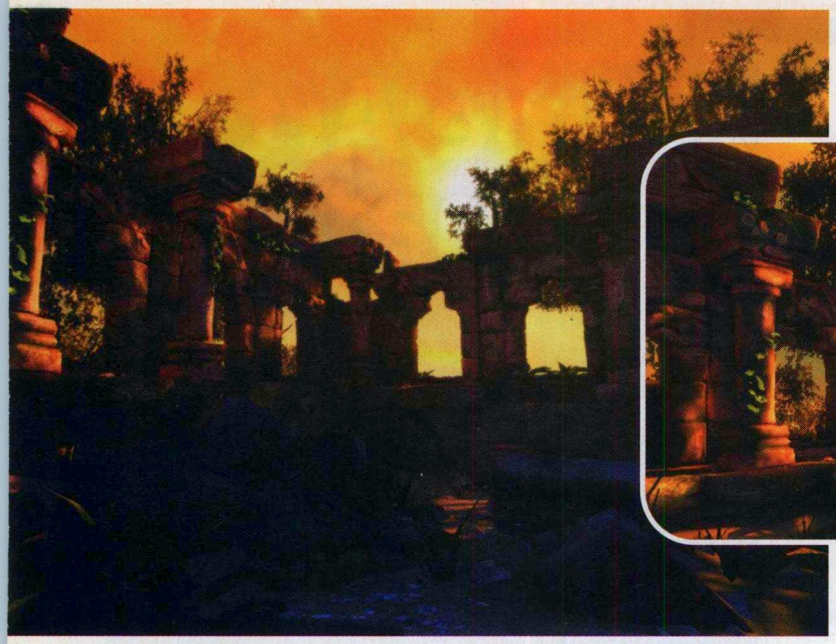

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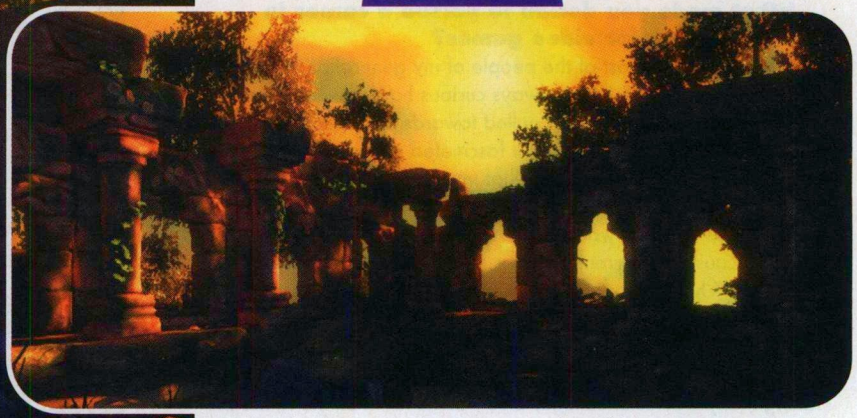


Currently I'm participating in two projects. One is an iPhone project for the American Book Review (ABR), which is developed on xCode and iPhone SDK4.1. This app is an entertainment software that provides the information on both back and current issues of ABR, and also integrates with the ABR Reading Series videos that could help readers watch on iOS devices, like iPhone, iTouch, or iPad. I've learned a lot about the development environment for iOS apps, which is very popular at the moment, and I'll definitely take that experience to my game development projects for iOS devices.

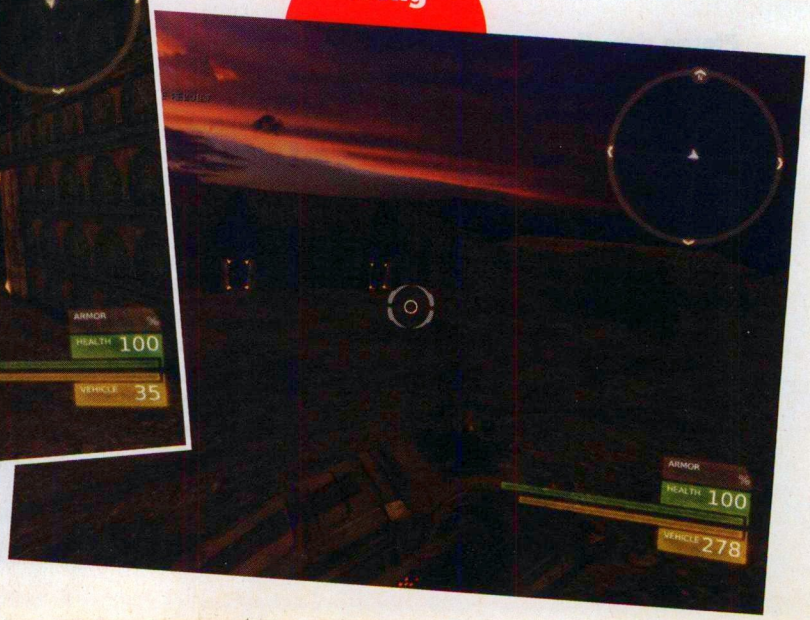
My other project is to build a vision interaction test software environment for Dr. Alireza Tavakkoli. My job here is mainly to build the test video that from the UDK game level, building skeletal animations for robots and adjusting cameras and kismet sequences to record videos for testing purposes.

Lisa: My favorite solo project that I've worked on so far is a temple ruins scene created in UDK over the course of one month. My preference for this project is solely based upon the amount of artistic freedom we were given. I made it my goal to try and learn several new techniques while completing this piece. This was my first environment completely textured in Zbrush using polypainting, as well as my first time using vertex blending in UDK. Learning the basics of these techniques has been vastly important to me and helped me produce my best environment to date. I plan on using these techniques with numerous projects in the future.

Also, I was the Art Lead of a five-month student game project with a team of five artists, seven programmers, and two producers. We produced a comical, fast-paced 3-D artillery game in a working environment that was very close to a real-world production cycle. The team had to continuously work together, establish a pipeline to properly get art into the game engine, deal with milestones set for us by Full Sail faculty, and respond to user feedback from testers, along with a plethora of other responsibilities that go along with making an entertaining game.

Bailey: I've done a few small games. My first game was a *D&D*-style text adventure I did in QBasic during my second year of high school. The projects after that were assigned for the Game Design program. I made a click-the-flying-pig game, a Farscape scrolling shooter, and a basic platformer. The game I'm working on for my senior project is an

Peng



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Student art by:
Kenny McBride

Grad Credits

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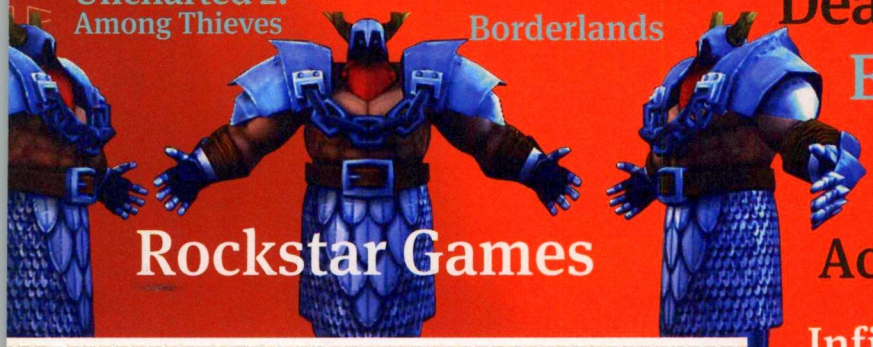

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epic RPG that I plan on finishing after the class ends and hopefully selling it.

Travis: I grew up in a retro-influenced household: my mother is a hairstylist and my father was your typical dad. All types of music were always being played, and all kinds of stories were being told. So most of the art I made for video games have had this type of involvement instilled in them. For my senior project, we were to create a 3-D environment for a video game, so I designed a Tiki-themed bike shop. It had a big impact on the rest of my career, and I try to make all my projects have a retro-original feel to them.

My current project is a tower defense game named *Hot Lava*. As you can probably tell from the name, it has a Polynesian feel to it. The game involves obviously tiki statues, hula girls, bamboo, volcanoes – lots of fun. As with any tower defense type game, the object is to stop the enemies on their way from point A to point B with the use of towers, but in our game point B is a volcano. Not only must you stop the enemies, you must keep the volcano from erupting and destroying the island. I created most of the art, user interface, and animations. Look for it in the Apple App Store soon.

What would you say is the most challenging thing about this kind of design work?

Lisa: The most challenging aspect of this industry is the fact that it is constantly changing and upgrading itself with advancements in technology. You have to constantly be on your toes, willing to adapt to changes in the industry standards, and continue to learn throughout your career. If you get stuck in old techniques of the trade, students who are using these newer techniques may well surpass you. As such, this career path can be time-consuming, but challenging and exciting if you're 100% passionate about it.

Travis: Keeping it fun. You can create the best-looking game out there with awesome gameplay, but if it's not fun who wants to play it? The main reason we play games is to be entertained and to be involved in a new reality. Once the player is taken outside of that, you've lost them. Especially in casual games, you have a limited amount of time with the player's attention, and if they don't have a smile on their faces in the first five seconds, they're on to the next game. So as a designer I want to influence them by keeping them anxious and thriving for more with words like "sparkly and shiny," "oooohs," and "ahhhhhs." The object for me is to get fans and cult followers – I want them to wear funny clothes and to worship my games as a celestial beings. Just kidding, I just want people to have fun (and come back for more so I can buy my mom a Mercedes Benz).

Peng: The most challenging thing is how everything changes all the time. At the beginning of the design process, the most challenging thing is having to learn about the development environment as quickly as possible and also making a detailed blueprint for the project. Then, in the process of the design work, making the game beautiful and playable is another challenge, as the developer must try new stuff all the time to meet the players' requirements. Finally, debugging might be the most challenging thing, because you can spend your whole day trying to solve one small bug. Really, all the development processes are challenging all the time.

Bailey: Being consistent and getting things to look the way I want them to. I'm on the design end, meaning the art, and I have a hard time drawing the same thing more than once. I'm definitely a "big picture" kind of person, and putting all the little details in can be daunting.

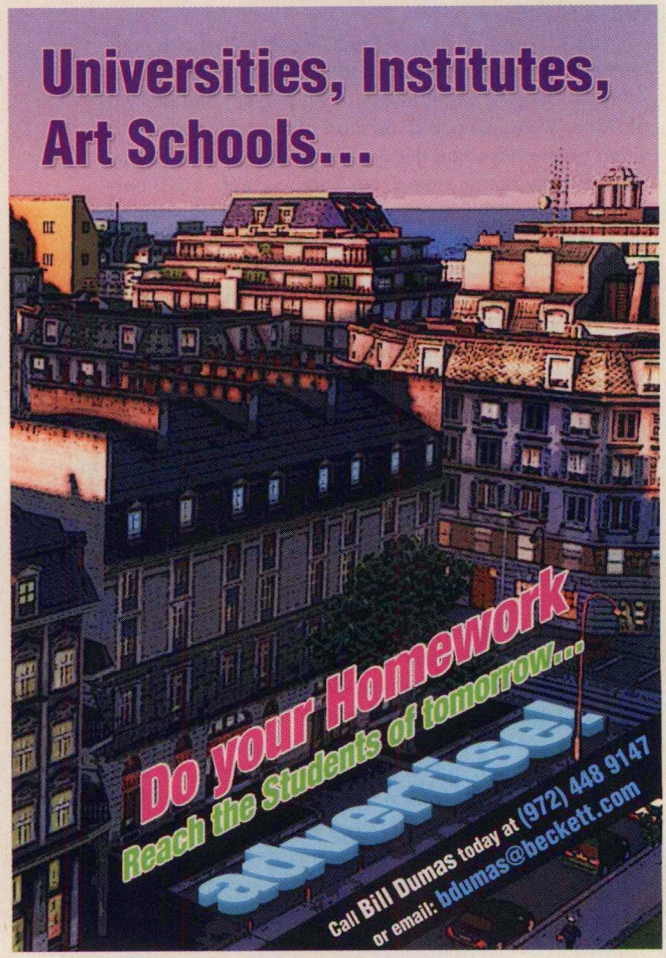
What do you think are the best looking games out there; alternatively, what kind of games would you like your work to emulate?

Travis: The best-looking games are the simple ones with basic shapes and colors. As humans we relate to shapes, the "round peg in the square hole" type of stuff. And we like to collect stuff, lots of it. Any game where you build upon something and make it bigger and better with collections is going to please almost all gamers. We also love progress bars and competition; if you can provide all this to the player, you might have a hit. We are in the age of mobile and social gaming, and I want to create games that mix this while influencing behavior to make us feel like we're creating our own worlds around us, to make us feel like we're kids again. If we added more playing to our reality, and treated it like a game I believe it will be easier to resolve conflicts, because we all like 1-ups and gold coins. Play more, argue less!

Lisa: I'm a huge fan of games that have a unique art style, such as *Limbo*, *Borderlands*, *Okami*, and *Shadow of the Colossus*. Not only are they fun to play, but they're also fun to look at. A lot of the times while playing these games, I find myself just stopping and staring at the world around my character. I could be biased, due to my traditional background, but the painterly look to games is far more interesting to me than a realistic one. I hope for this same creativity to stem into my environment art in the future. These same games are what inspire me to create something entirely new, free from realistic constraints.

Bailey: That's a bit of a loaded question for me. I've always been disappointed in people who can't see past the graphics. I'll admit, games like Infamous and *Assassin's Creed* are breathtaking, but I also love 2-D graphics, like in *Disgaea* or *Mana Khemia*. The best-looking games aren't always the ones that can crash your graphics card; sometimes they're the simple ones, too. It just depends on how you use what you have (as long as you leave bloom out of it).

Peng: I think the best-looking game right now is *StarCraft 2*, and I would like for my work to emulate a SC2 kind of game.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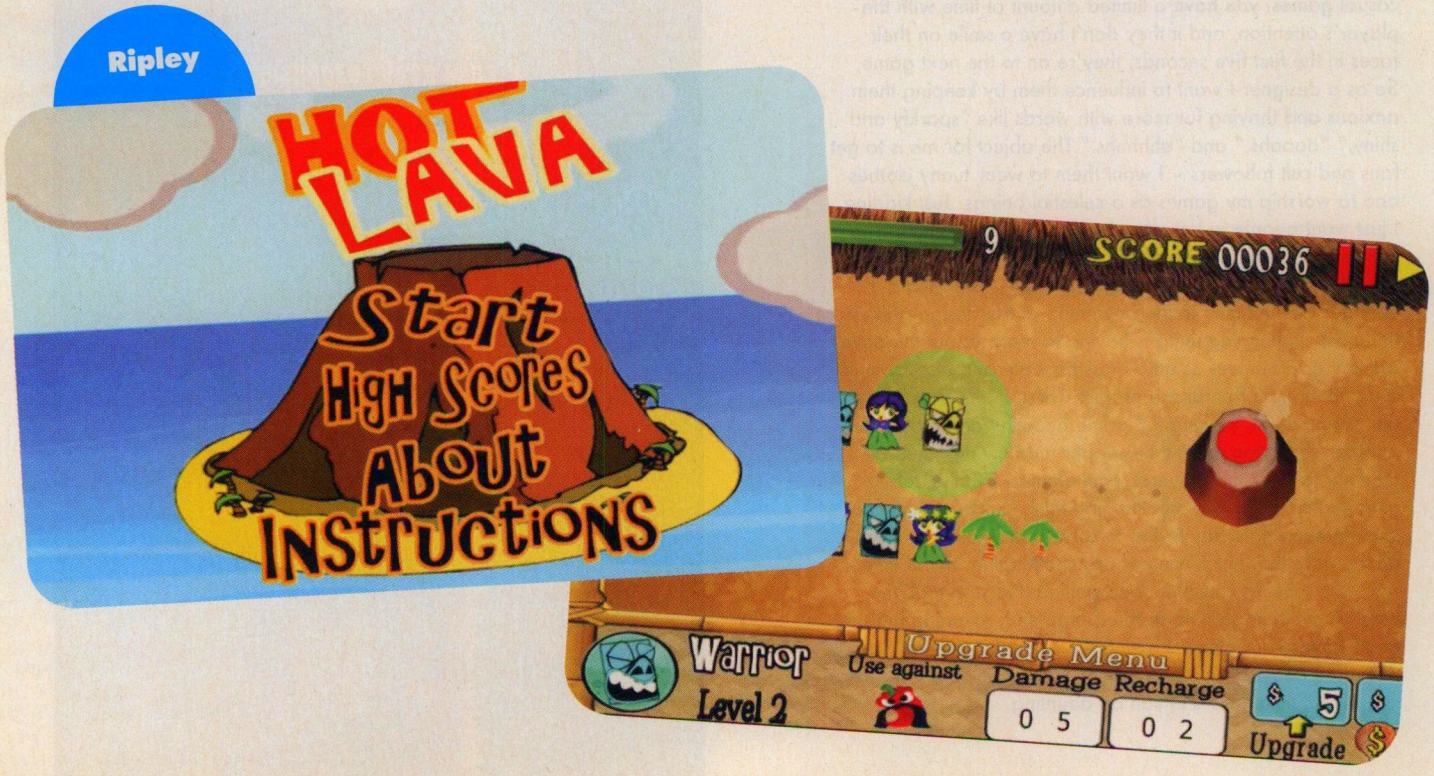

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BY SEAN KAVANAGH

MOG 2010 HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

GIFT-GIVING TIME OF YEAR IS NEARLY UPON US (WE'RE REFERRING TO WOOKIEE LIFE DAY, OF COURSE). THAT MEANS THE OFT-PAINFUL GIFT-BUYING TIME IS ALSO HERE. FORTUNATELY, WE'RE HERE TO HELP, WITH SOME OF THE SWEETEST GEAR THAT ANY MMO GAMER COULD ASK FOR!

Smack down game account hackers

Few things are creepier than logging into *World of Warcraft* to discover your bank's been cleaned out and your blood elf is standing in her underwear on a mailbox outside the auction house because hackers have been using your character to spam gold-selling services. Um, not that it's ever happened to us.

Give your favorite WoW players the gift of security to make sure they never face that scenario either. The Battle.net Authenticator adds another layer of security to *World of Warcraft*'s login process by requiring users to enter a unique, ever-changing six-digit code that appears on the authenticator when its button is pushed.

Plus, it looks cool on your keychain and comes with an in-game core hound pet. You can purchase it through Blizzard's online store at http://us.blizzard.com/store/. For just $6.50, it's a great stocking stuffer!

A gift for the game-hopper

Whether it's a short attention span, commitment issues, or the simple need for variety, some gamers compulsively jump from game to game. Sounds like somebody on your gift list? Give the PlaySpan Ultimate Game Card!

Players redeem the UGC to pay for game time or premium content in over 1,000 games, including MMOs such as *Age of Conan*, *Runes of Magic*, *Eve Online*, and several SOE titles. Available at many retail stores, you can find where to purchase cards locally at http://ultimategamecard.playspan.com

MMO room, dorm, and cubicle décor

Vanity may not be a trait to brag about, but appealing to it is a way to guarantee your gift is a hit this holiday season. Use Heroic Prints' PrintWarcraft service at www.printwarcraft.com to create custom posters and mousepads based on real *World of Warcraft* player characters. Just punch in the character's name and server info, then pick from predefined background templates. You can even tweak the gear shown and choose an appropriately epic pose. Prices range from $17.99 to $29.99 for posters and $19.99 to $32.99 for mouse pads.

For less self-involved gamers, Heroic Prints also offers a line of gorgeous *EverQuest II* and *World of Warcraft* artwork, available as prints and mousepads. The WoW prints are sold through the site mentioned above and you'll find the EQ2 items at www.printeq2.com with prices in the $17.99 ballpark.

Shift gaming to a new level

For most people, a keyboard is just a device for inputting information into a computer. For gamers, it can be the key to unlocking an alternate reality and, more importantly, a weapon for crushing foes. The SteelSeries Shift gaming keyboard ($89.99 at http://steelseries.com) is tailor-made to help players bring the pain.

Virtually every key can be customized to play back actions or defined macros, but the highlight is the keyboard's replaceable keysets. Players can swap keysets to use configurations customized for such popular games as *World of Warcraft*, *Aion*, and *Starcraft II*. Keysets currently cost $24.99.

If this sounds familiar, it's because the SteelSeries Shift is the evolutionary successor to the Zboard product line. The software has been completely re-engineered so it's easier to use and the hardware has been upgraded with high-quality peripheral ports, better ergonomic design, and sturdier components. More good news: keysets are compatible between the two series.

End chat challenges

If you're buying for a gamer who spends lots of time raiding, voice chat is a must for coordinated attacks. Creative Labs' Sound Blaster *World of Warcraft* Headset ($119.99) will be a welcome gift. It's comfortable, the sound and mic quality are great, and the processing software makes conversations easier to hear.

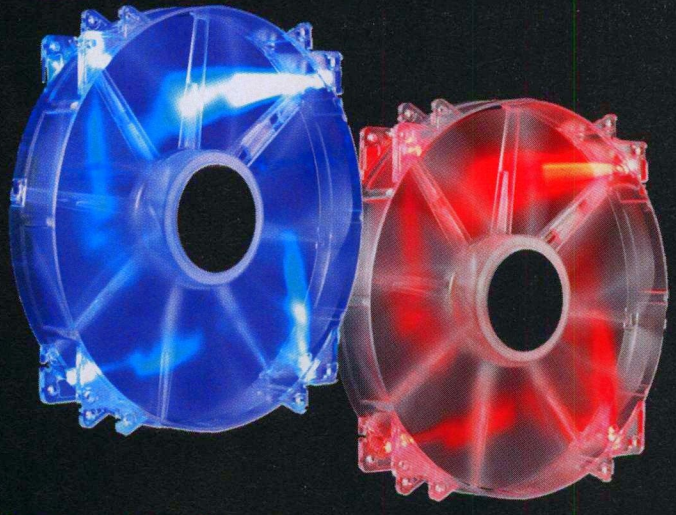
If you're a high roller, consider springing for the wireless version ($159.99) or adding on the Sound Blaster *World of Warcraft* Tap Chat ($29.99). The Tap Chat foot pedal lets players push (or stamp) to talk and it can also be used to fire a macro.

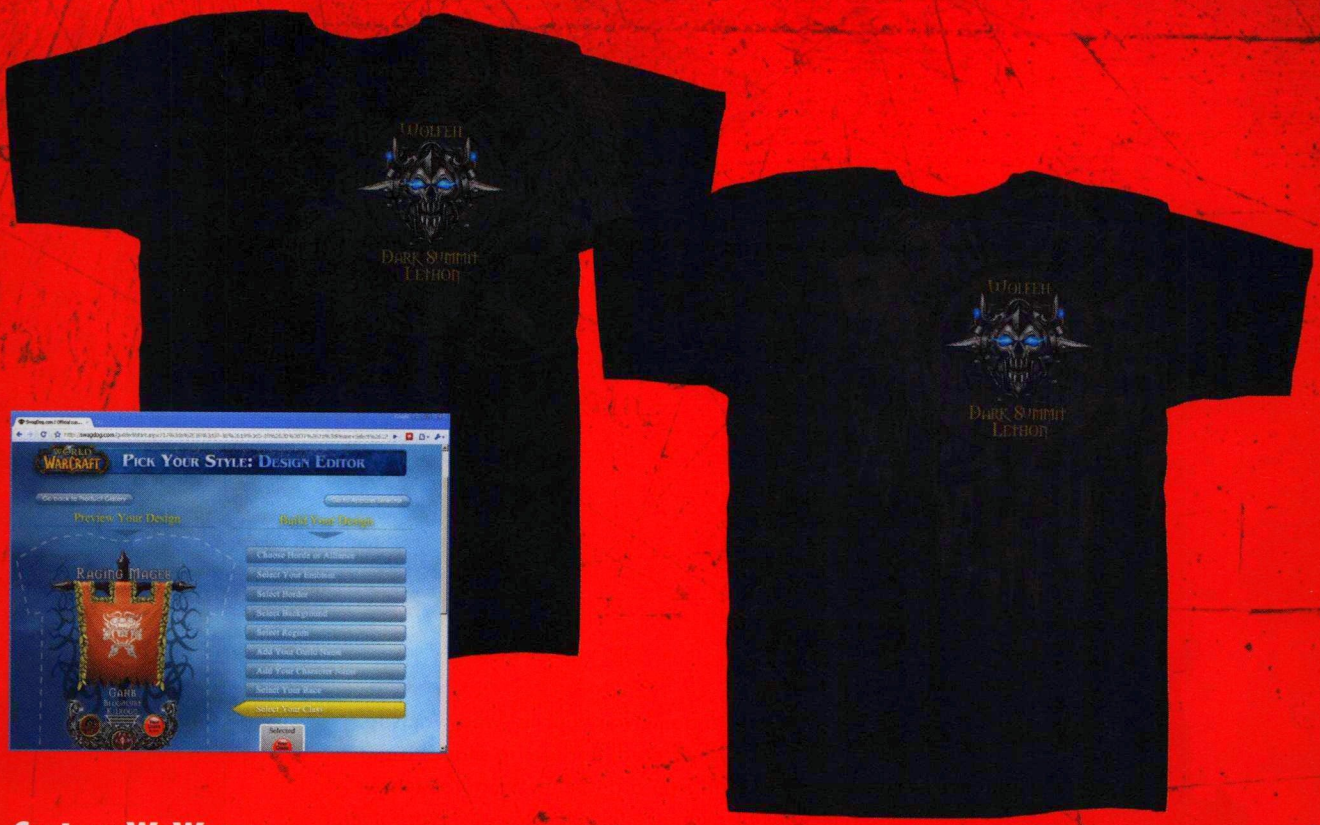
Go for the glow with tricked-out rigs

Flaunting character gear to make everyone envious is a big part of every MMO. Why not extend that practice to real-life gear, such as a gaming PC? Get the DIY enthusiasts on your list parts from Cooler Master and help them create awe-inspiring gaming machines.

For a big-ticket gift, the HAF X full-tower case (costing around $199) is a classy chassis. The High Air Flow system keeps things from getting toasty, and the design provides easy access to the innards. Plus, it looks like it could withstand direct mortar fire, features an acrylic window to show off the high-priced components inside, and its glowing red LED front-side fan is wicked. And if we learned one thing from TRON, it's that everything is better when it glows.

If you're looking for something less pricy, but no less glowy, consider the MegaFlow 200 Silent Fan, available with blue or red LEDs, for about $20. This 200mm case cooler is able to push twice as much air as smaller fans and, best of all, it won't sound like an airplane is revving up in the room.





Custom WoW wear

The custom designer at www.swagdog.com lets you create shirts and hats based on WoW guilds and characters. Just plug in the appropriate info to retrieve guild tabard, faction, class, and race details. Then, pick from several clothing styles, choose a size, and you've got a great personalized gift. There's also an option to design from scratch in the event that the character on which you're basing the design isn't in a guild. Items run between $24.99 and $28.99, depending on size.

Take it to the (gaming) mat

Gamers will often spend scads of money on a PC and overlook a key gameplay peripheral: the mousepad. A freebie mousepad is fine for office work, but often won't provide the precision or response that can make the difference between being a fragger or a fraggee.

The Razer Vespula Gaming Mouse Mat ($34.99) is a mousing surface that gives players the edge in two ways. One side is optimized for mouse movement speed and the other is tailored to provide control, letting players switch to better support a particular game or play style. The gel wrist-rest helps gamers play longer, so no more agony after marathon raid sessions.

Game on the go with Alienware

Most gaming laptops qualify as desktop replacement machines, and the extra horsepower also means extra bulk and weight. Trust us, you don't want to run for a connecting flight with one on your back – although technically in the "portable" category, the more accurate description is "luggable." If you're shopping for a game-playing road warrior, the Alienware M11x laptop is the ultimate gamer gift.

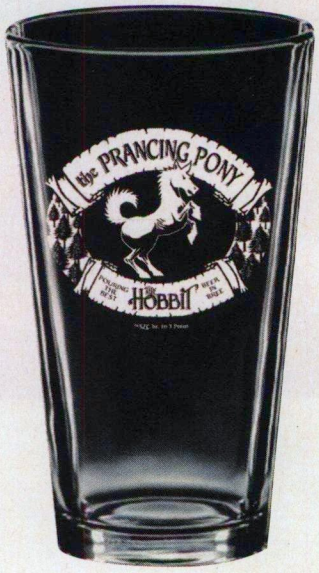
The 11.2" x 9.2" dimensions and 4.5 pound weight aren't quite in the netbook realm, but this is a small laptop that blows away most of its brethren. Graphics on the 11.6" display are gorgeous, thanks to the 1GB NVIDIA GeForce GT 335M GPU. Capable of running an i7 2.266 GHz CPU and up to 8GB of DDR3 RAM, this machine smokes. Plus, like all Alienware products, it looks badass. Although the M11x isn't exactly cheap (starting price is $1,198), it packs a ton of power and proves that bigger isn't always better.

Drink holiday eggnog in style

If you have a gamer on your list who wants to look cool, stay hydrated, and get in shape, a gift from Taverncraft is in order. They've got extensive collections of sculpted steins inspired by *Warhammer Online* and *World of Warcraft*. Sure, most people will put them on a shelf, but they are completely food-safe, so bottoms up! Weighing in at three pounds, every sip gives your arm a workout. Plus, the Warhammer Online steins come with in-game items and character bonuses.

Although technically not tied to Lord of the Rings Online, there's also a line of steins and pint glasses inspired by *The Hobbit*. Give your *LOTRO* player a Prancing Pony pint glass (yes, Pippin, they come in pints) and make merry!

Prices range from $40 to $390 and you can check out the collections at www.3point.com.



Old Republic winter reading list

For any gamer eager to play *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, the wait until spring 2011 is agonizing. Help ease the pain with the Dark Horse comic series set in BioWare's game universe and written by senior game writer Alexander Freed. Issue #6 is coming out at the beginning of December and past issues are available at www.darkhorse.com for $2.99 each.

For a multi-coloned novel experience, pick up *Star Wars: The Old Republic: Fatal Alliance* ($27.00). A Hutt auction involving mysterious artifacts turns into a caper that forces Jedi, Sith, Mandalorian, and more unlikely factions to team up and save the galaxy.

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BY DAVE SPOHN

HOT HARDWARE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

GIFT IDEAS FOR PC GAMERS

It's always great to find a shiny new computer peripheral under the tree, so we're once again searching out some of the most desirable devices for the PC gamer on your shopping list this Holiday Season. With such a vast array of hardware to choose from, it can be difficult to find the perfect convenient access, and eye-catching appearance.

MSI GX660R GAMING NOTEBOOK

For an avid gamer that does a lot of traveling, a notebook PC is essential. I've traditionally recommended Alienware's fine notebooks, and I still think they're a great value, but MSI now offers a series of gaming notebooks that are also very attractive. The GX660R features an Intel i7 CPU and an ATI Mobility Radeon HD 5870 video card. The integrated speakers, which include a subwoofer, are several steps up from the average laptop. With a 15.6" display, the GX660R remains reasonably portable, unlike some more expensive models with 17" or larger monitors. ($1600, us.msi.com)

DIGITAL STORM DESKTOP GAMING PC

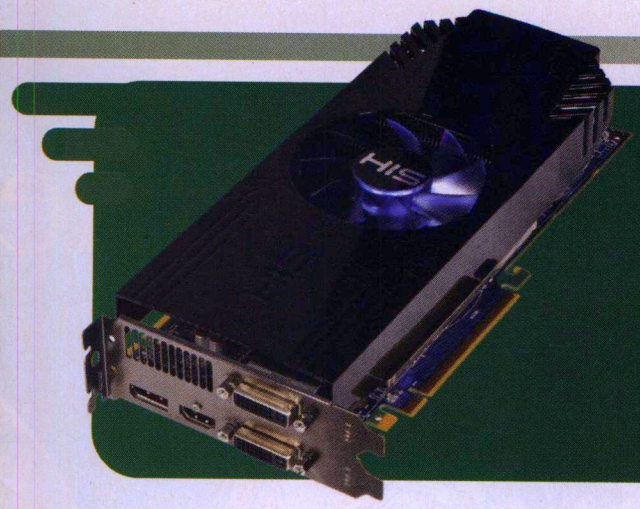
Most gamers still prefer desktops, in part because they're easy to upgrade and they support very large monitors. Not everyone wants to take the trouble to build a system themselves, so there are many dealers that specialize in custom-built game PCs. You'll typically pay a small premium over buying the parts and assembling them yourself, but you can get a system tailored to your needs and budget. Digital Storm lets you mix and match from a huge variety of components and enclosures for a good fit. I arrived at $1200 by taking one of their basic Special Ops configurations with an Antec DF-85 case and upgrading the graphics card to a Radeon HD 5770. ($1200, digitalstormonline.com)

NVIDIA 3-D VISION BUNDLE

3-D is growing in popularity – not just for movies, but for video gaming as well. 3-D Vision is a combination of shutter glasses and a special driver that let you play hundreds of PC games in stereoscopic 3-D, and it works with nVidia cards all the way back to the GeForce 8800. The glasses are wireless, connecting to the system via an IR transmitter, and they're a little more stylish than customary 3-D eyewear. One obstacle to this solution is that it requires a monitor with a refresh rate of at least 120 Hz – considerably faster than the 60 Hz displays most of us are using. The 3-D Vision Bundle includes a 120 Hz Acer GD245HQ LCD, which accounts for a significant part of the price tag. You can purchase the 3-D Vision Kit separately for about $200. ($628, nvidia.com)

OCZ 60 GB AGILITY 2 SOLID STATE DRIVE

Although not an essential, using a solid state drive (SSD) for your OS and program files can reduce boot times and make your games load considerably faster. Until recently, SSDs weren't of much interest to desktop users because of their high price and limited capacities, but as is often the case with new technologies, SSDs are rapidly improving on all fronts, as well as getting more affordable. They're not ideal for everything yet; HDDs still write a little faster and can be rewritten more times than SSDs, so many people keep their data and cache files on HDDs. The 60 GB OCZ Agility 2 makes the grade for speed and offers plenty of space for Win 7 and several of your favorite games. ($150, ocztechnology.com)



HIS RADEON HD 5870 ICOOLER V TURBO X VIDEO CARD

The Radeon HD 5870 is among the fastest single-GPU video cards on the market, and it strikes a good balance between performance and power consumption. Of the numerous different versions of the HD 5870 HIS makes, the Turbo X features a GPU overclocked from 850 to 900 MHz. The iCooler V is a high-performance, dual-slot cooler that pushes air out both ends of the card, without making too much noise. For gaming at high settings on a large monitor, these cards are hard to beat. ($390, hisdigital.com)

WORLD OF WARCRAFT STEELSERIES MMO MOUSE

It's not often that you see a mouse tailored specifically to the needs of people playing a particular game, but the SteelSeries *World of Warcraft* mouse is exactly that. This high-resolution laser mouse has 14 nicely placed buttons with more than 130 preset game commands. It can be easily configured in game and stores up to 10 different profiles. This *WoW* mouse also streamlines the creation and assignment of macros, with support for Blizzard's scripting language. This device really shines when used with *WoW*, but it's a good choice for playing other MMORPGs as well. ($100, steelseries.com)

ANTEC LANBOY AIR CASE

For those who want a PC case that offers the ultimate in flexibility, Antec has come up with the LanBoy Air. At first glance, it resembles a mid-tower enclosure, but it's highly modular and the panels are all made of mesh. Compartments in the LanBoy Air can be rearranged, the PSU can be placed at the top or bottom, drive cages can be rotated, and so on. Fans can also be placed on both sides of the case for massive airflow. The LanBoy Air currently comes in yellow or blue and sells for about $200. (www.antec.com)

CYBORG R.A.T. 7 GAMING MOUSE

Comfort is a key factor in finding a mouse you enjoy using for hours on end, so Cyborg set out to make the most adjustable mouse they could. The result looks like something out of a Transformers film, and you can change its length as well as the position of the thumb rest. For even further customization, you can alter its weight, and it has interchangeable palm and pinkie rests. The R.A.T. 7 has five programmable buttons and a unique thumb wheel to accompany the standard scroll wheel. Cyborg also makes R.A.T. 5 and R.A.T. 3 models, which have a fewer features and a lower price tag. ($100, cyborggaming.com)

LOGITECH GAMING HEADSET G330

Sometimes a headset is the only way to get into the action without disturbing roommates or family members. The G330 features a behind-the-head design rather than the customary over-the-top headband, which won't sit well with everyone, but most people find them quite comfortable. The noise-canceling microphone is positioned on a rotating boom, and the G330 includes both USB and 3.5mm jacks. It's an affordable headset that should serve all your voice-chat needs. ($50, logitech.com)

RAZER GOLIATHUS MOUSEPAD

Given that the mouse is still central to gaming on a PC, it's no surprise that many gamers want an ideal surface for their mouse to slide on. There are a remarkable variety of gaming mousepads on the market, so they're a little hard to shop for without taking personal preferences into consideration. The Goliathus is one of many pads offered by Razer, and it comes in a super-slick Speed Edition and a slightly rougher Control Edition. There are also three different sizes to choose from, the largest measuring 17.5 by 14 inches. ($15-$25, razerzone.com)

BY ALEX LUCARD

The Evolution of the

Out of all the mythological creatures that are routinely encountered in a role-playing game, no race of creatures has changed more throughout the centuries than the mighty dwarf. It's hard to believe that, long ago, dwarves and elves were almost interchangeable. This issue, we'll be taking a look at how the dwarf has evolved over the years and which of its characteristics have stood the test of time.

Like a lot of core RPG races, the dwarves originated in Germanic and Norse mythology. The word "dwarf" comes from the Old English word "dweorȝ," which itself came from the Germanic "dwergaz." The original plural for dwarves was either dweorȝe or dwerwes, but in the 18th century, "dwarves" became more commonplace, until it was cemented as the universal plural by Tolkien in his fantasy writing. ("Dwarfs" is the proper term for dwarf stars or people who suffer from dwarfism.)

DWARVES YESTERDAY, ELVES TODAY

Norse dwarves are actually the oldest version of the race. Here, the "dvergar" are actually nature spirits who love making crafts, forging metal, and other smithy types of labor. In fact, the greatest weapons in Norse mythology were created by the dvergar – Skíoblaonir, Gungnir, Draupnir, Mjolnir, and others were all their handiwork. The dvergar are part of what is known as the "Vættir," much like Norse elves and giants. Dvergar had dark hair and exceptionally pale skin and were strongly linked to death, even going so far as living in burial mounds. Dwarven religion was animistic and ancestor worship was common. Unlike today's modern dwarf, the dvergar were as tall as humans. In fact, with their pale skin, obsession with death and the underground, and dark hair, the dvergar were actually the forebearers for what we now call "dark elves," or drow. The only real difference between the two is that dvergar had beards. In fact, if you read the *Poetic Edda* (the seminal work of Norse Mythology), you'll notice that the word "dvergar" is used interchangeably with that of "Svartálfar," which are the black elves, and the word "Døkkálfar," which means "dark elves."

In modern times, Gary Gygax brought back the dvergar to fantasy literature by renaming them "drow," and making them firmly a race of elves, separate from the modern fantasy dwarf. Gygax wrote that he took the word "drow" from a 19th-century book named *The Fairy Mythology*. The original drow were tiny Scottish fairies who lived in caves and made things out of metal. Gygax felt it was close enough to the dvergar and made the name change. However, Gygax misread the *Poetic Edda* and took the Norse word "svartr" to mean "dark-skinned" rather than "dark-haired." And that's how the original dwarves of mythology are now the modern-day dark elves.

ENTER THE ENGLISH

Things get weirder when we talk about the English version of dwarves known as duergar. In modern fantasy, the word "duergar" has been adopted by *Dungeons & Dragons* and assigned to a strange mix of the original Norse dvergar and modern dwarves. However, the *D&D* duergar are firmly evil and are meant to be a dwarven equivalent of the drow… which is funny when you realize the drow were originally dwarves anyway. Try not to think about it too much; it'll make your head hurt.

Classic English duergar are relatively recent in the scale of things, coming out in the mid- to late-19th century. These duergar are ugly short little creatures that look somewhat human and dress as we do, but in ways that are so slightly off – hats made of moss or shirts made of lambskin, for example – that they are instantly noticeable. These folkloric duergar were not very friendly folks themselves. Late at night, they would go out with torches and find travelers that were lost in the dark and fog. The traveler would follow the torchlight into what he or she thought was safety when the duergar was actually leading them into a bog or some other danger. This is

Dwarf (a short summary)

much like the classic will o' the wisp legends seen throughout Europe. Duergar also supposedly dissipate at dawn and return only once the sun has set.

GERMANIC DWARVES

Germanic dwarves might prove to be the most recognizable when compared to the modern fantasy dwarf. Germanic dwarves were short, stout, and excellent craftsmen. Their skill with a smithy and a hammer was so good that even the gods were humbled by their craftsmanship. These dwarves, however, tended to be more comical in nature than the more serious or reserved Norse dwarves. For example, the dwarves of the fairy tale *Snow White* are Germanic dwarves. They exist as comic relief, even if they take themselves seriously and they work in a mine and are excellent with crafts. Rumplestiltskin is also a Germanic dwarf. Most of the Germanic dwarves have lost their racial name thanks to the emergence of modern fantasy dwarves, and even the dwarves of *Snow White* would probably be recast as a generic fantasy race or gnomes if not for Disney's film.

TOLKIEN'S DWARVES

J.R.R. Tolkien's dwarves are the core basis for the modern fantasy dwarves. They have lifespans several times as long as a human. They are stronger than men, but also shorter. They tend to have long thick beards (yes, even female dwarves) and are bitter enemies of the orcs. They also tend to be standoffish with elves, but that pales in comparison to the hatred they have for orcs and goblins. *The Hobbit* single-handedly rewrote how dwarves look, act, and are thought of by fantasy readers and much of Tolkien's version of dwarves remain today, thanks to so many fantasy writers being inspired by his works, as well as the popularity of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

The only thing that doesn't really remain is the concept of female dwarves having facial hair like the men. This actually came about when people started to realize Tolkien rarely wrote about female characters and only references one female dwarf, which is hidden away in *The Lord of the Rings*' appendices. As such, Tolkien fell back on the "female dwarves look exactly like male ones" excuse, but that hasn't really saved his writing from being savaged by literary critics who view them with inherent sexism. Very few forms of fantasy still contain bearded female dwarves. Only some versions of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Like *Greyhawk*) or Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series still feature female dwarves with Tolkien-inspired beards.

All this is really only a drop in the bucket regarding the history of everyone's favorite subterranean and/or mountain dwelling fantasy race. In this brief space, we've managed to cover the four major types of dwarves throughout history, along with the jumbled mess that comes with the interchanging of names and races of the original dwarves so that they stand alongside today's fantasy dwarf. If you're interested in learning more, pick up a book of classical Norse myths and see just how drastically different dwarves have become over the millennia.

c.2010 Linda Carlson
THE BRASSE.com
Ubear! Why did ye stop?
Ubear?
Is he LD?
Hello?
Is this thing on?
I just fired Bob for playing games on the job.
Just trying to see how to shut this down...
Hmm. Menu, abilities, quests, inventory...
Hey, this is kinda cool.
Whoa, this sword is on FIRE!
This is Bob Folsom's boss.
Uh, "Ubear's" boss...
RAID WIPE BY BOSS MOB
Maybe I can play with you for a bit...
I am a CEO.
Sorry, we need raiders wi' experience.
How about I give you all of Bob's plat?
Yer in!

GAMING TERMS

Sure, you might know what a "newb" is, but did you know that a squishy can unleash massive DPS? Or that PUGs have no need for DKP? Just in case none of this makes sense, here's a quick list of all the MMO terms you'll run across both here and in-game.

AoE – Area of Effect. Generally these are spells/buffs/etc. that will only affect people (for good or ill) within a specific range of the caster.
Aggro – Short for "aggravation." Aggro is a point system that tells a monster which player it should attack, depending on how much damage (or heals) a certain player deals.
Alt – An "alternative" character that's not played or favored as much. "Alt-itus" and other variations are used to describe a person who has many alts and plays them more than their main.
CC – Crowd Control. Used to refer to any ability that hinders an opponent from attacking or moving.
DKP – Dragon Kill Points. A point system normally used by raiding guilds in order to distribute highly-sought-after items fairly, based on how often a person raids.
DoT – Damage over Time. DoTs come in the form of spells or poisons that deal a small amount of damage over a long period of time.
DPS – Damage Per Second. Damage dealing classes, such as those with high agility or powerful spells, generally have the greatest DPS.
F2P – Short for "free-to-play," referring to an MMO that has no upfront fee (but usually charges you for various extras).
FPS – First Person Shooter. In this mode, you can't see your character, but you can see your weapon and everything else around you.
Ganking – Literally, it means to steal something. In- game, it's a **gang** kill, either when one side has an unfair advantage due to numbers or a high level player kills a much lower one.
Griefing – When someone goes out of their way to ruin other players' play time.
HoT – Heal over Time. A heal that rejuvenates an ally slowly over time.
Kite – Used to describe the action of dragging a mob behind a player. Generally a small amount of damage must be dealt every few seconds to keep the mob from de-aggroing.
KS(ing) – Kill Stealing. This happens when one player attacks a creature someone else was attacking and they end up getting credit for the kill instead.
Leeroy – If someone says "don't pull a Leeroy," they mean "don't wipe." Leeroy Jenkins is famous for a video that shows him wiping his entire group on dragon hatchlings in *WoW*.
LoS – Line of Sight. This is basically an issue many games have where if you stand behind an object, you can't fire at something on the other side. It's also a bug that occurs a lot in MMOs even if the target is in sight, which is referred to as "LoS issues."
MA – The Main Assist pulls targets, tells which target the other players should be hitting, and sets the pace for the group.
Main – Your #1 character, as designated by the player. Generally there's a great deal of attachment to one's main, since they're normally a person's first character.
Mez – Short for mesmerize. An ability that takes control of an enemy's mind and either keeps it from moving around or controls it.
MDK – Murder Death Kill. To kill something completely and totally.
Mob – Originating (most likely) from "mobile," mobs are monsters controlled by the game.
MOG – "Massive Online Gamer." Only the best MMO magazine this side of Azeroth.
MT – The Main Tank is the player who holds aggro while other players kill the enemies.
OT – Off-tanks hold aggro on other monsters when dealing with multiple enemies.
PK(er) – A Player Killer.
PUG(s) – Pick Up Group. A group made up of people who've never played with each other before. Generally they're less reliable than a group of friends or guildmates.
PvE – Player versus Environment. Comprises of gameplay where the player fights mobs.
PvP – Player versus Player. Any situation where players fight other players.
Raid – A large group of people joined together to kill things.
RTS – Real Time Strategy. These are more commonly single or multiplayer games and involve building defenses or moving troops.
Squishy – Used to describe a character who wears the weakest armor available in a game.
Wipe – Occurs when the entire group dies.
XP – Experience, which is a must for leveling up in every game.

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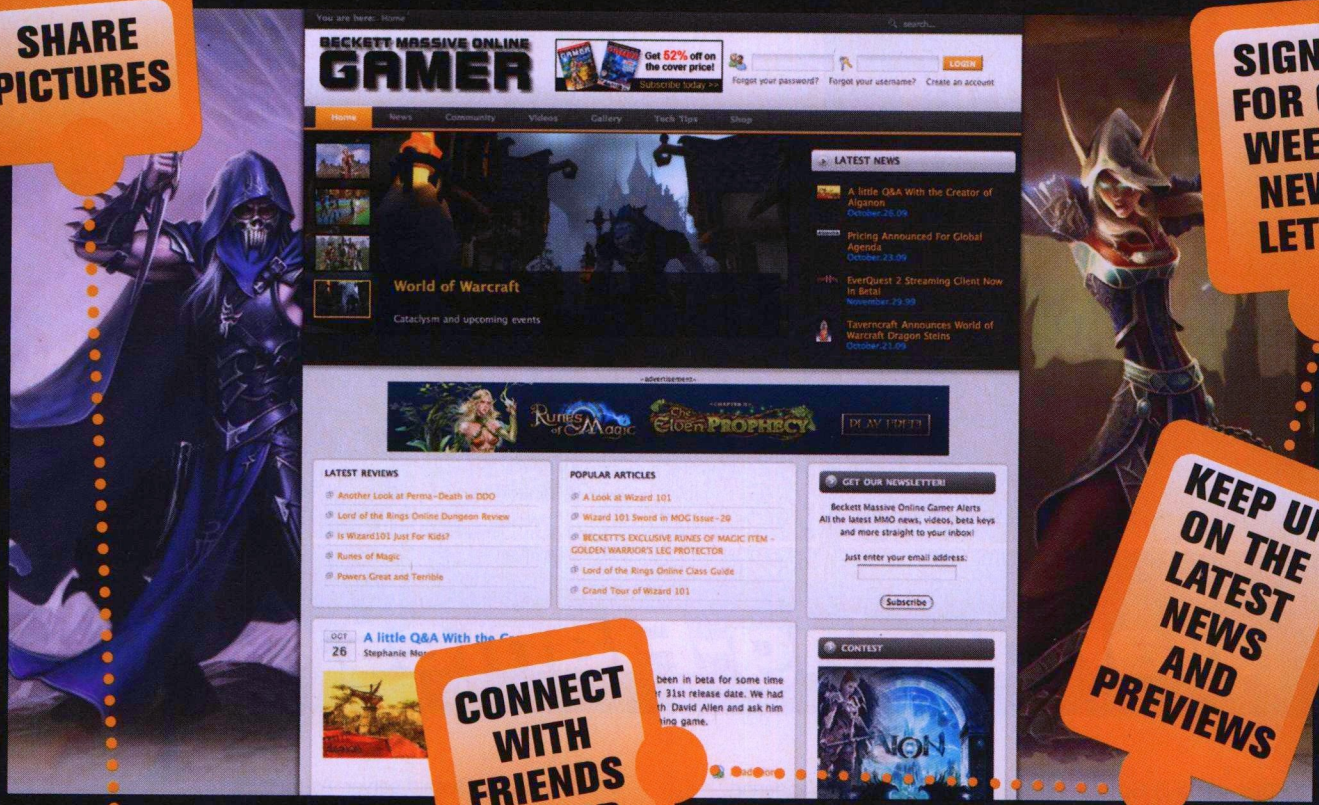
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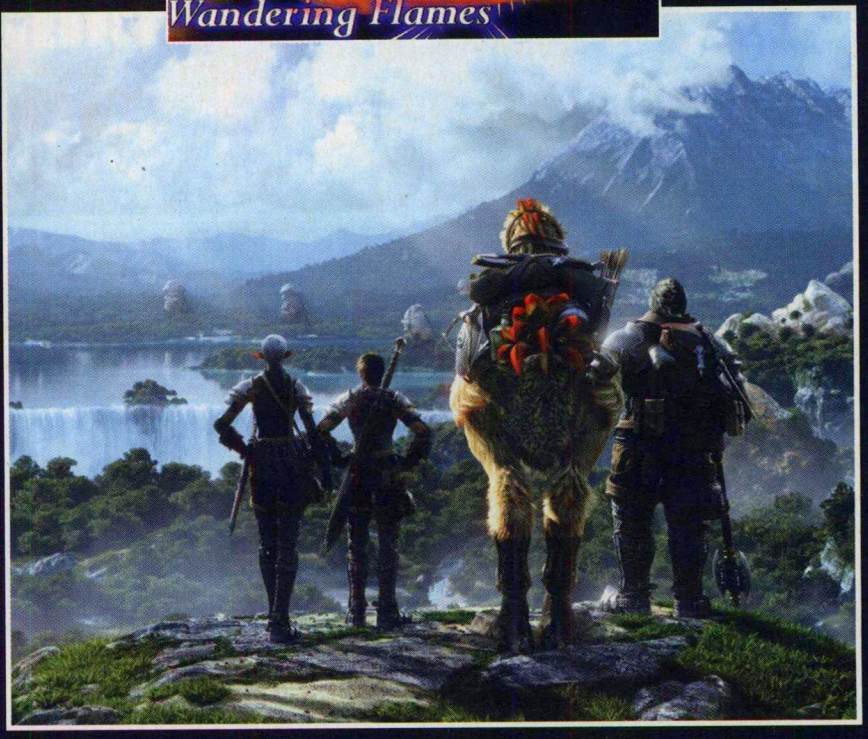


Wandering-Flames.com

This month in Guild Spotlight, we take a look at Wandering Flames, a large group dedicated to having fun and getting the job done in *Final Fantasy XIV*. Aiolos, the leader of Wandering Flames, walked us through the guild's goals and let us know how to join the guild.

Please introduce us to Wandering Flames.

Wandering Flames is a guild concept that grew from years of MMO gaming. We started in *Ragnarok Online* about six years ago under a totally different name. Through it all, what we stood for hasn't changed. In the face of adversity (older, more populated guilds with elite, snobbish players) we decided to band together and make the game a lot more fun, rather than allow it to become a chore. Even though we had tons of fun, we still accomplished the same things that the elite guilds were able to accomplish, but usually with less players and nothing like Ventrilo to help us out. It was a casual atmosphere, and we've brought that idea into Wandering Flames for *FFXIV*.

Is Wandering Flames a competitive guild?

Progression and competition are incredibly important to all of us. However, there aren't any features in *Final Fantasy XIV* right now that will allow us to distinguish ourselves in a really competitive way. Each and every member wants this guild to be the best it possibly can be, yet we have a very different way of going about achieving that. Instead of trying to force people to play when we want them to, or putting strictures on how people play the game, we let everyone choose what they want to do and merely encourage them to do their very best at it. Every job and play type is useful in some way, and everyone has something to offer.

We play on the Besaid server. As an (unofficial) RP server, we find that it's easier to get along with people and that the immersion of the game is enhanced.

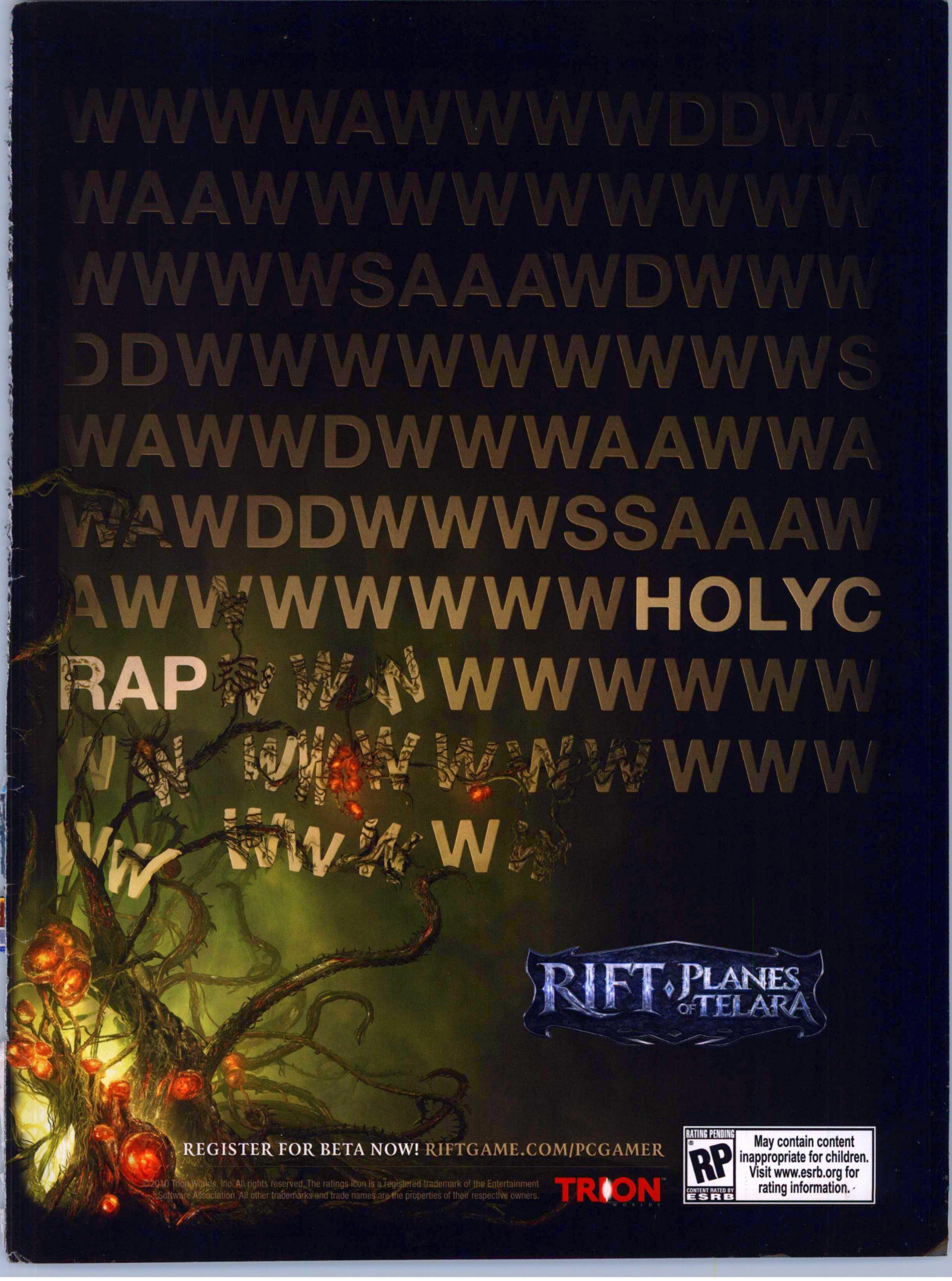
How has your experience with the game been so far?

My personal experience with the game so far has been nothing but positive. If you started out with unrealistic expectations and refuse to be social, you might find yourself feeling stuck or lost or maybe just unsatisfied with how the game works.

Fortunately, we haven't lost any members since the game launched, and nobody in our guild has had any real troubles with the game. As the leader of a large guild, you can only work so hard to ensure that everyone is enjoying their play time, but honestly, I haven't had to work that much. Not to mention that I have awesome sub-leaders (Chocobo, Mohri, and Kiyoshi) who help out with keeping everyone on track and passing out instructions and things of that nature.

How would one qualify to become a member of Wandering Flames?

To any new members who'd like to join our guild, head on over to Wandering-Flames.com and fill out our application. At this point, we're looking for active, friendly players who'll be able to play during either U.S. or EU peak hours. A new application will be put up soon (or pre-launch one is still up now), and it will be a bit more detailed. So, if you're a mature (you know if you are) individual, 17 years old or older, and you feel like a peaceful, fun atmosphere with lots of emphasis on teamwork and progression is right for you, then bring yourself to our site and sign up!



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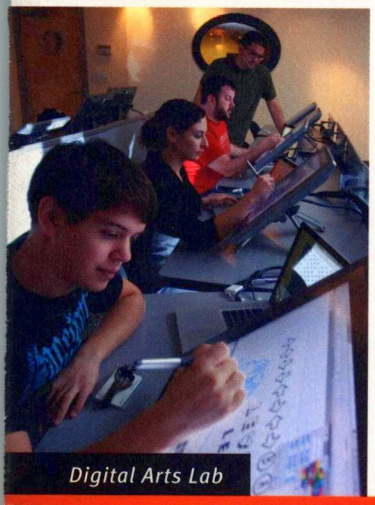
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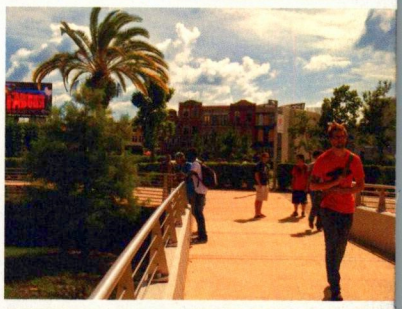

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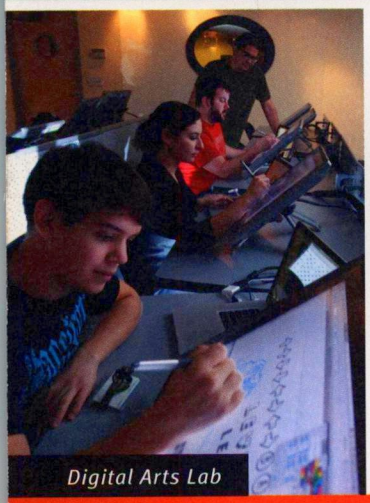
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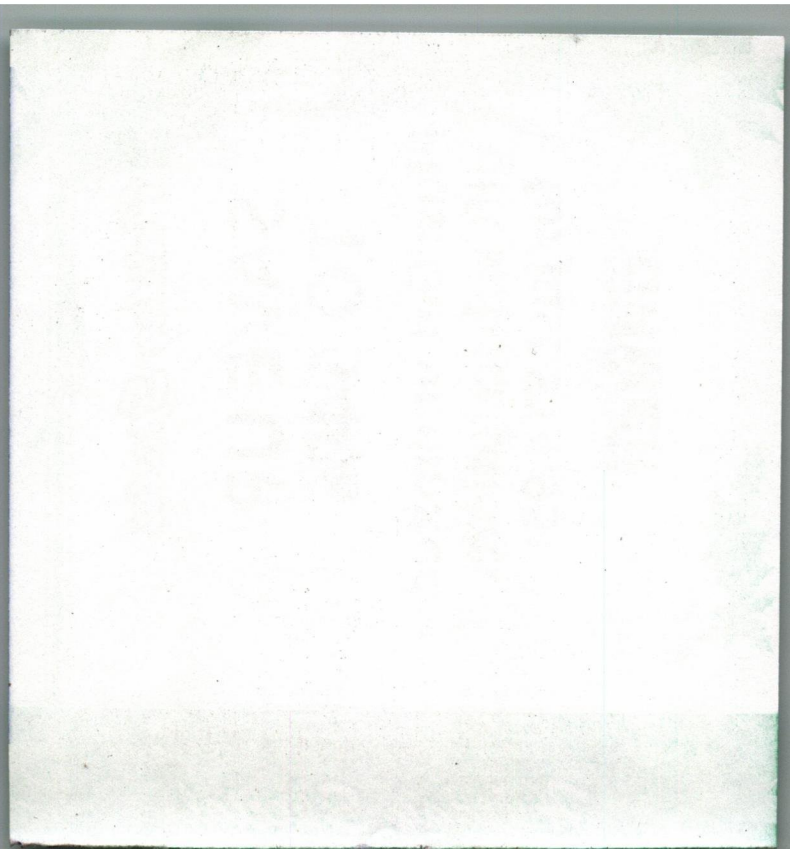

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